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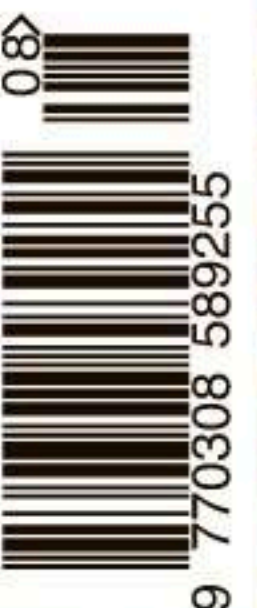
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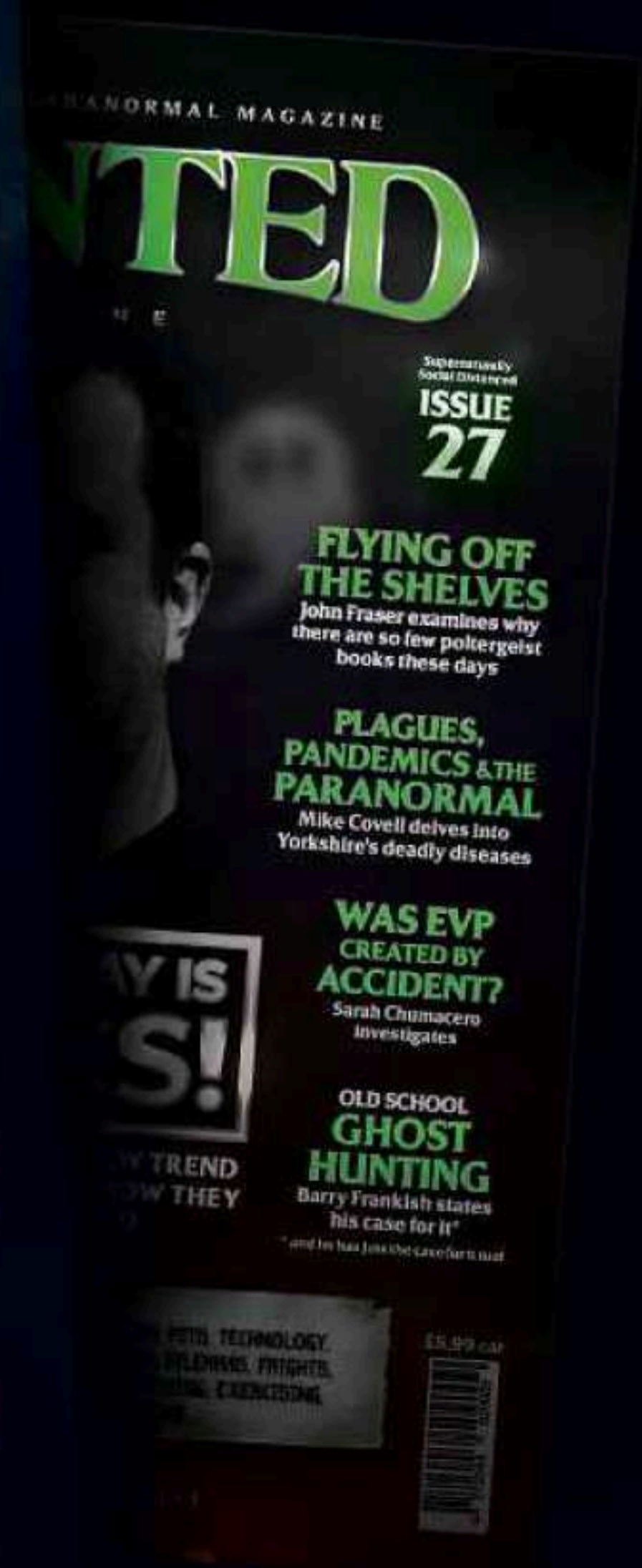
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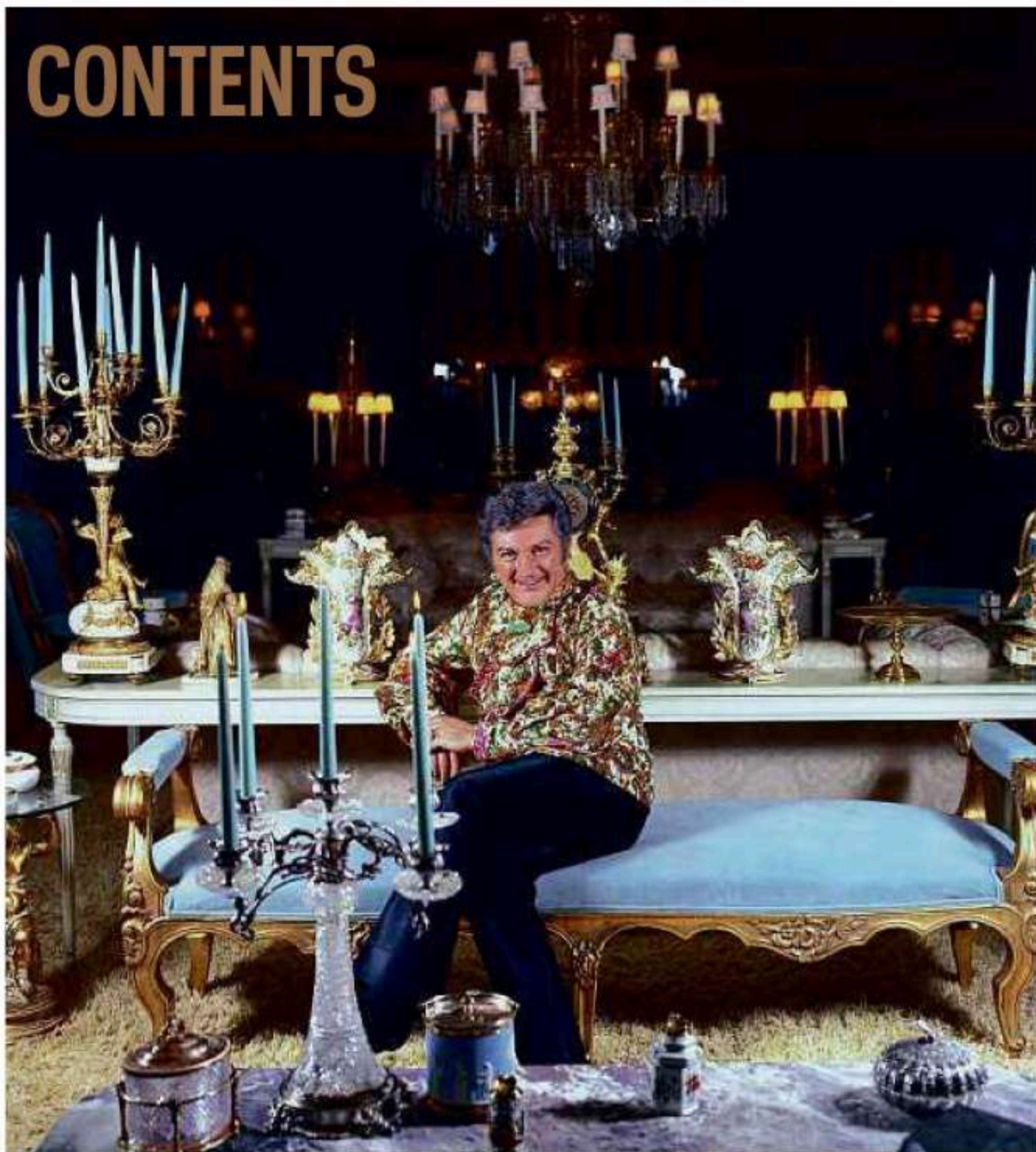
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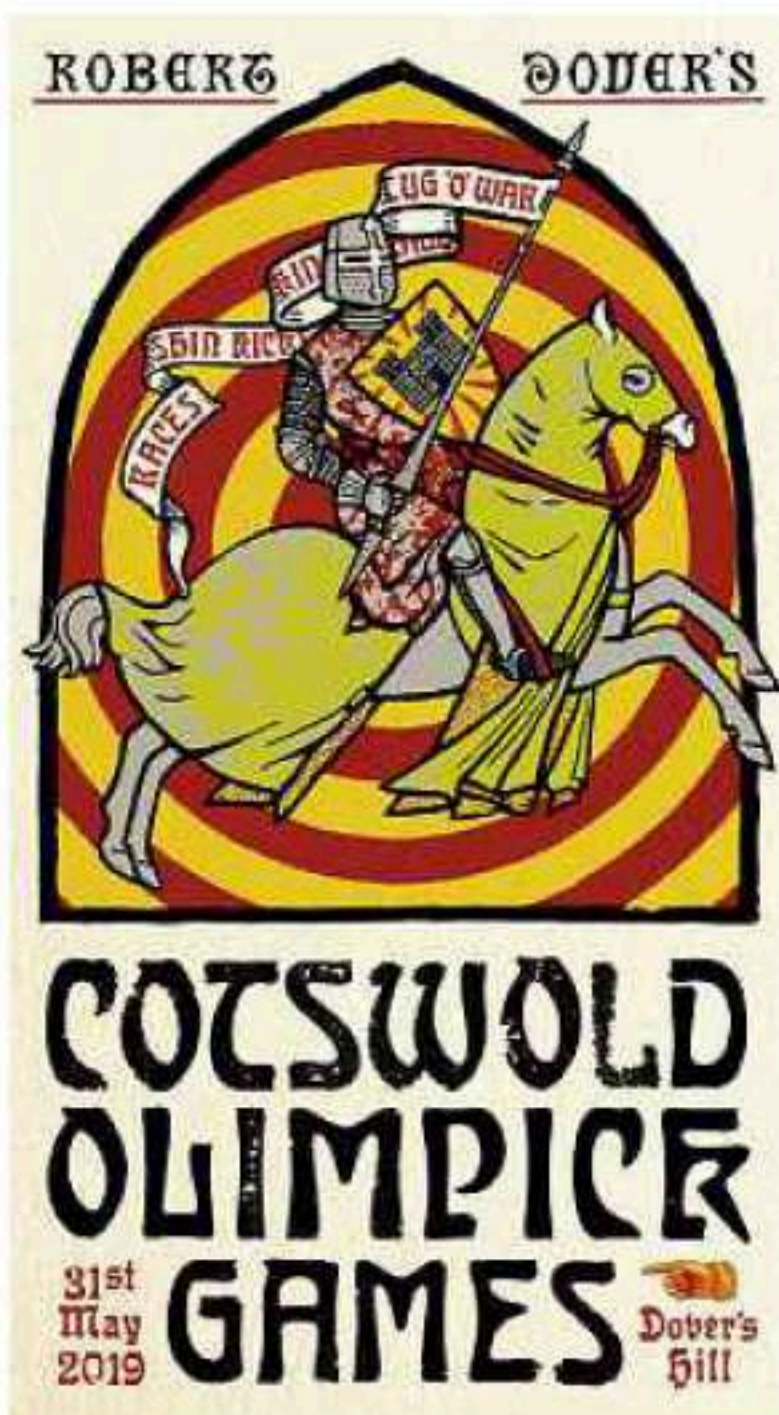


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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

DISCLOSURE DEFLATED

The weeks leading up to the release of the Pentagon's UFO report saw more ink spilled on the topic than we remember in many a year. Suddenly, there was a feeding frenzy of interest in a subject the mainstream media – tabloids aside – don't usually care for; broadsheet newspapers and 'respectable' periodicals carried lengthy pieces about why it was now OK to talk about UFOs, discovering in the process that these ambiguous objects had morphed into UAPs. Meanwhile, for old-school saucer-botherers everywhere, disclosure seemed imminent...

In the event, the report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence ("Preliminary Report: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena") looked like a brief footnote to the acres of verbiage preceding it: a mere nine pages of distinctly unsensational findings accompanied by sober and sensible suggestions for future investigation. It should, of course, be remembered that the report's brief was to establish whether UAP, whatever they are, constitute a danger to aviation and a security threat, not to look for proof of alien visits to Earth.

To summarise, it noted that "limited data and inconsistency in reporting" pose a key challenge to evaluating UAP and concentrated on just 144 reports from 2004 to 2021 from US military/government sources – incidents "witnessed firsthand by military aviators and that were collected from systems we considered to be reliable."

It suggested that most of the UAP reported "probably do represent physical objects given that a majority of UAP were registered across multiple sensors, to include radar, infrared, electro-optical, weapon seekers, and visual observation." Most sightings clustered around US training and testing grounds, "but we assess that this may result from a collection bias as a result of focused attention, greater numbers of latest-generation sensors operating in those areas, unit expectations, and guidance to report anomalies."

Eighteen incidents involved unusual movement patterns or flight characteristics – the kind of sudden changes in speed or execution of abrupt manoeuvres often reported in typical UFO sightings – and might possibly "demonstrate advanced technology". The only UAP identified with "high confidence" was "a large, deflating balloon" – which may describe the feelings of committed disclosure-heads on reading the report. The remaining 143 sightings remain "inconclusive" and "unexplained"

– a glimmer of hope for saucer-seekers, perhaps, but attributed here to limited data and inconsistent reporting mechanisms – a situation the report wants to see rectified. Eleven incidents reported near misses, and therefore a danger to flight safety.

The report makes the obvious, but fortan point, that UAP probably lack a common source and single explanation (as we have been arguing for years), but also suggests that reports would fall into five distinct categories: "Airborne clutter", "Natural Atmospheric Phenomena", "United States Government or Industry Developmental Programs", "Foreign Adversary Systems", and "Other".

As well as problems with data and reporting, the report flagged up another issue familiar to forteans – the reluctance of witnesses to come forward due to the threat of "reputational risk", particularly in the case of pilots and military personnel: "Narratives from aviators... describe disparagement associated with observing UAP, reporting it or attempting to discuss it with colleagues." This was another factor making scientific pursuit of the topic difficult, but it was hoped that serious engagement with the subject on the part of "the scientific, policy, military, and intelligence communities" might mitigate it in the future.

The view from Fortean Towers was mostly positive, with all agreed that the creation of a formal reporting procedure, the destigmatisation of the subject and the encouragement of military personnel to report incidents were good things. Peter Brookesmith was slightly dismayed by the reluctance of the Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force to engage with the work done by serious researchers from the UFO community and other non-governmental sources, and Dave Clarke added that "what they turn up needs to be open to public scrutiny. The danger is that if everything is covered by cloying secrecy it will simply encourage more conspiracy theories and media hype."

You can read the report for yourself at: <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Preliminary-Assessment-UAP-20210625.pdf>. Meanwhile, Nigel Clarke looks at reactions to the report (p30) and Jenny Randles grapples with the notion of "disclosure" (p31); next issue, Dave Clarke will be asking what comes next, and reveals a troubling incident that took place in British airspace in 1993.

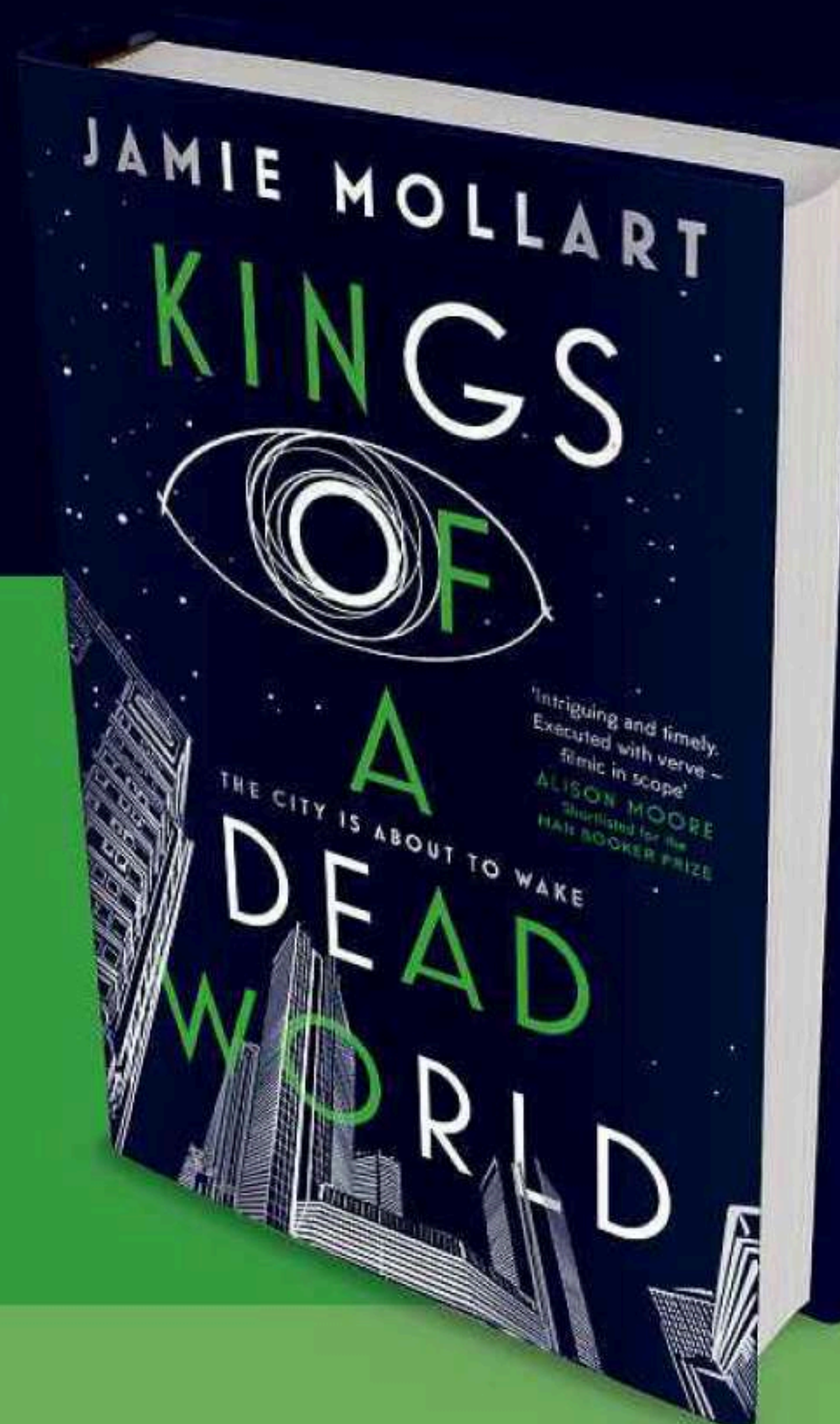
JAMIE MOLLART KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD

THE EARTH'S RESOURCES ARE DWINDLING. THE SOLUTION IS THE SLEEP.

INSIDE A HIBERNATING CITY, BEN STRUGGLES WITH HIS LIMITED WAKING TIME AND THE DISEASE STEALING HIS WIFE FROM HIM. WATCHING OVER THE SLEEPERS, LONELY PERUZZI CRAVES THE FAMILY HE NEVER KNEW.

EVERYWHERE, DISSATISFACTION IS GROWING.

THE CITY IS ABOUT TO WAKE.



'THIS IS A FRIGHTENING, THOUGHTFUL VISION EXPLORING WHERE POWER LIES WHEN EVEN THE ACT OF BEING AWAKE IS REVOLUTIONARY'.

ALIYA WHITELEY, SHORTLISTED FOR THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD

'I WOULD LIKE TO SEE *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* MADE INTO A 'CLI-FI' FILM, MARKED AS BOTH A CAUTIONARY TALE AND SATIRE'.

JULIET BLAXLAND, SHORTLISTED FOR THE WAINWRIGHT PRIZE

'A HAUNTING VISION OF THE NEAR-FUTURE WITH EXPERT WORLD-BUILDING AND RICH COMPLEX CHARACTERS, *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* KEPT ME GRIPPED FROM BEGINNING TO END'.

TEMI OH, WINNER OF THE ALEX AWARD

'MOLLART'S INTRIGUING AND TIMELY PREMISE IS EXECUTED WITH VERVE - *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* IS FILMIC IN ITS SCOPE'.

ALISON MOORE, SHORTLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

'*KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* INTRIGUED ME WITH ITS TITLE AND HAD ME ON PAGE ONE. MOLLART'S DYSTOPIAN VISION IS AS DISTURBING AS IT IS BRILLIANT'.

GILES KRISTIAN, SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LANCELOT*

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

RODENT INVASIONS

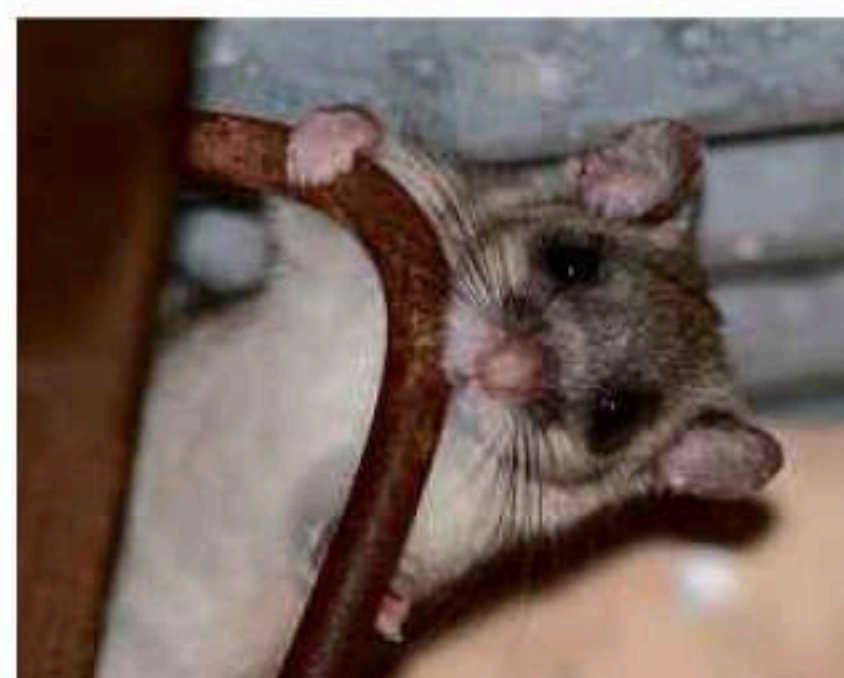
Australia is hit by a monumental mouse plague, while UK dormice thrive

MOUSE PLAGUE IN OZ

Australia is in the grip of a plague of mice, described by Steve Henry, of Australia's national science agency CSIRO, as "monumental". The plague, which is devastating agriculture along the eastern seaboard, threatens to reach Sydney by the end of this year, with experts warning city dwellers to "rodent-proof your food". Australia suffers periodic mouse explosions when the environmental conditions suit them, as a single breeding pair of mice can produce 500 offspring in a year. They start breeding at six weeks old and can have litters of up to 10 pups every 20 days.

Even by Australian standards, though, this is an apocalyptically bad year. Video from Australian farms shows torrents of rodents raining from grain silos, swarming across roads, and destroying everything before them. One grain farmer said that on his local roads you could hardly see the tarmac for the fur of squashed animals. A run of dry years was broken in 2020, creating ideal conditions for the mice: farmers had bumper crops, there was plenty of water and good shelter. Farmers who did manage to harvest their crops have had them completely consumed in store, while many have not even got that far, with mice stripping fields before farmers can get to them.

It is not just Australia's farms that have been impacted by the mice; homes and public buildings can be wrecked and people have had their sleep disturbed by mice biting them in bed. John Southon, Principal of Trundle Central School in New South Wales, said: "Your furniture is



TOP: Mouse plagues in Australia are nothing new, as this 1917 photo attests. ABOVE LEFT: One farmer's catch of rodents. ABOVE RIGHT: An edible dormouse.

She found nests in the cushions and mice in every cupboard

eaten... all the insulation in the air conditioning systems. They've eaten the wires out of the roof of the school, they've eaten parts of the power board in the principal's residence." Louise McCabe of Tallimba, 500km (310 miles) west of Sydney, went away for four weeks and returned to find thousands of mice in her house. "They've chewed through the

carpet and the wooden floor, the oven is no longer functioning... they ate the insulation of our dishwasher," she said. She found nests in the couch cushions and mice in every cupboard. They had eaten laminate and destroyed chipboard with their urine, utterly wrecking the kitchen, and the family's clothes were completely soaked in mouse pee.

The Australian government is distributing bromadiolone, an extremely strong mouse poison and offering compensation payments for those worst affected, but this is being condemned as too little, too late, and significant concerns are being raised about the environmental impact of the

poison on birds of prey that eat mice. Australians hope that, with winter arriving shortly, the weather will be cold enough to stop the onslaught in its tracks and reduce the mouse population to manageable levels once more. <i>29 Mar; Guardian, 14 May; Independent, Sky News, 15 May; 7news.com.au, 23 May; dailymail.co.uk, 26 May 2021.

DOUBLE DORMICE IN UK

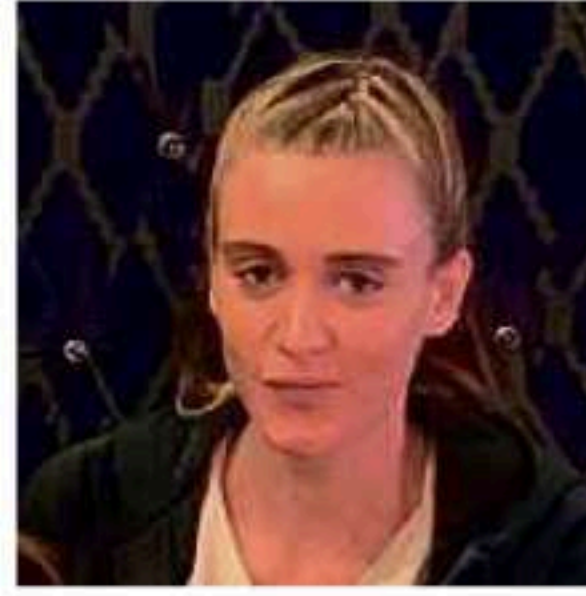
In its own quiet way, the UK, too, is experiencing a mouse plague. Edible dormice have doubled in numbers in Britain over the last 10 years and are starting to move into towns from their usual woodland habitat. A protected species, once prized by the Romans as a delicacy, they are much larger than the mice eating Australia. At 8in (20.3cm) long, plus a fluffy tail, they are twice the size of the common dormouse. The creatures became established in the UK after six escaped from Lionel Rothschild's private collection in Tring, Hertfordshire, in 1902. For a long time, they were confined to woods in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire; however there are now an estimated 100,000 in the wild and they have spread to Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, London, and Oxford. They have also taken to invading homes in considerable numbers, with a record 145 removed from one house in London. Elsewhere, they damaged a collection of classic cars when they got into the garage and gnawed cables and wires. The mice hibernate from November to May, and pest controller Paul Bates said: "When they wake... It is not unusual to find them in airing cupboards, storerooms or kitchens, searching for food." More than 200 have been culled by pest controllers so far this year, more than in the whole of 2020. *S.Mirror, 22 May 2021.*



A KNOCK AT THE DOOR...

When ghostly baillifs make a house call

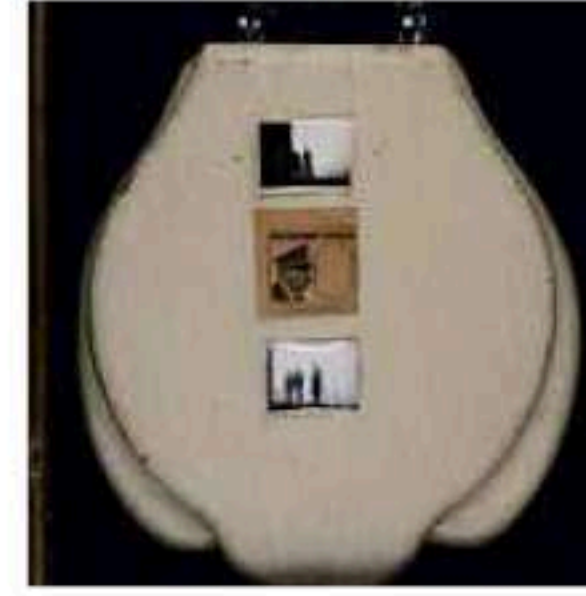
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WHO'S THAT GIRL?

Australia's strange serial impostor

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AUCTION ODDITIES

Unusual items go under the hammer

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THE BROOD X FILES

Clouds of cicadas louder than jet aircraft mass on America's east coast



PHOTOS: CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: A newly moulted periodical cicada clings to a plant. ABOVE RIGHT: Many people view the cicadas as a tasty delicacy.

May 2021 saw the latest appearance of Brood X (ten) cicadas, the biggest brood of periodic cicadas, along the east coast of America. The insects, which are up to two inches (5cm) long, appear in huge numbers every 17 years when temperatures reach 18C (65F) reaching densities of up to 1.3 million per acre as billions and possibly trillions emerge at once. Once they emerge, they shed the protective shell in which they have hibernated and set out to attract a mate, with the males making a strident buzzing sound to attract the females. At such high densities, this can be deafening; at its peak, the sound of massed Brood X cicada males calling tops 96 decibels, making them louder than a jet landing at Heathrow. Females do not sing but make a clicking noise. Cicadas seeking mates have been known to be attracted to power tools and lawnmowers. The adult cicadas do not eat, having spent their 17 years underground nourishing themselves on plant sap sucked from roots. They do, however, release excess fluid, producing

what is known as "cicada rain", prompting some people to wear wide-brimmed hats in peak years. As adults, they live for no more than four weeks, with the males dying as soon as they have mated and the females once they have laid eggs. On hatching, the cicada larvae burrow into the ground as quickly as possible and attach themselves to plant roots, where they will stay nourishing themselves for the next 17 years until it is time to emerge again.

There are various cicada broods, of which Brood X is by far the largest. They were assigned roman numerals based on their year of emergence and their location. Broods I to XVII are 17-year cicadas, while XVIII to XXX follow a different, 13-year cycle. No one is entirely sure why the cicadas have evolved this periodic lifecycle, although it is thought likely to be as a defense against predators. Few predators live long enough to remember a previous emergence, and by emerging in such massive

numbers the cicadas overwhelm anything that might prey on them: no matter how many get eaten, there are still millions left to breed. They do, though, get infected by the parasitic fungus *Massospora cicadina* that has evolved to match the cicada cycles. This affects only the males, making their abdomen and genitalia fall off, but it also makes them exceedingly sex-crazed, so that they spread the fungus. It even causes males to make female wing clicks, attracting other males who then try and mate with them. However, it only ever manages to spread through about five per cent of any emergence before the mass die-off. Infected insects are reputed to be prized by people who claim they get an amphetamine-like high from consuming them. Others view uninfected cicadas as a delicacy and eat them – apparently, they taste like tinned asparagus. *BBC News, 17 May; Guardian, 26 May 2021.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

FRENCH WOMAN SPENDS THREE YEARS TRYING TO PROVE SHE IS NOT DEAD

theguardian.com, 12 Jan 2021.

Missing man found dead inside Spanish dinosaur statue

theguardian.com, 24 May 2021.

GARDAI PAID FOR BEING IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE

Irish Times, 5 Mar 2021.

Mammals can breathe through anus in emergencies

Physorg, 14 May 2021.

HUMAN REMAINS FOUND IN PETERSFIELD CEMETERY 'NOT UNEXPECTED'

BBC News, 24 May 2021.



SIDELINES...

RUBBER GLOVE RAMBO

Rambo the Rottweiler had to be rushed to the vet for emergency surgery after he vomited a surgical glove. On being given an endoscopy his stomach was found to contain 29 more that had to be removed during a three-hour surgical procedure. His owner, Darren Coyne, kept a box of gloves in his car and said Rambo must have eaten them when travelling to and from walks. Vet Keith Leonard said though Rambo arrived “seemingly without a care in the world,” Mr Coyne’s quick thinking had “saved his life.” *BBC News, 6 May 2021.*

OUT OF PLACE PENSIONER

Elizabeth Mahoney, 89, spent 10 weeks in hospital battling Covid before being discharged, but her family grew worried after she did not arrive back at her home in Newtown, Powys. On investigation, she was found eight miles (13km) away, tucked up in bed in a stranger’s house. Her son Brian, 65, said “she tried to tell the ambulance workers this was not her house. They kept calling her Margaret.” It is believed her details had been confused with those of another patient who was being discharged the same day. *D.Express, 19 April 2021.*

POISONOUS PEOPLE

Researchers at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology in Japan studying genomes have come up with the first solid evidence that venom glands in snakes evolved from early salivary glands and share a functional core with the salivary glands of today’s mammals. As a result, they speculate that “under certain ecological conditions” it would be possible for humans to evolve to produce deadly poisons in their saliva. *D.Mail, 30 Mar 2021.*



COVID CORNER | Weird science in Wuhan, jabs in Castle Dracula and Shakespeare dies again...

COVID’S CONTESTED ORIGIN

From the start of the pandemic there have been rumours about the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (also known as SARS2) that causes Covid-19, suggesting that it was the result of an accidental release from a research lab and that it was a virus engineered by scientists. Swiftly picked up by conspiracy theorists, they were just as swiftly debunked by Western scientists, with letters by groups of leading virologists appearing in *The Lancet* and *Nature Medicine*. While suspicion was aroused by the presence of China’s leading coronavirus research lab, the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), in the virus’s presumed city of origin, there seemed to be absolutely no evidence that it had anything to do with the infections and it was deemed more likely that the city’s wet market was the source of the outbreak. The first people whose infections were initially reported were all associated with the market, and China’s wet markets have form as sources of novel viral infections: the SARS1 outbreak of 2002-04 is thought to have originated in a wet market in Foshan and involved a bat virus crossing to civets, then to people. Partly as a result of President Trump’s enthusiasm for the idea, the lab origin theory seemed completely consigned to the fringes (see **FT407:20**).

Wet markets do provide ideal circumstances for the generation of novel viruses; they are often huge places where many species, both wild and domestic, are sold alive and dead and where they are kept in crowded conditions close to creatures they would not otherwise encounter. The markets are like one huge bioreactor where all kinds of animals mix with humans, allowing exchange and recombination of viruses to create novel variants. If such viruses can also pass easily between people, they are a pandemic waiting to happen unless prompt action is taken. Nonetheless, China has been less than forthcoming about the actual origin of the virus and provided only limited access to



ABOVE: Peter Daszak arrives at the Wuhan lab as part of the WHO team – but he is also president of a US organisation that funded coronavirus research at the WIV.

a World Health Organisation (WHO) team sent to get a definitive answer as to its true source (**FT403:7, 404:6**). Unusually, though, they found no evidence of environmental traces of SARS2. With SARS1 and the later MERS, the original infected bat population and intermediary host species were quickly found, and there was evidence from blood tests that some people had been exposed to the viruses before the infection rate took off; but there is none of that for SARS2 before December 2019. As a result, the actual origin of the virus remains unknown and its attribution to the wet market no more than an educated supposition.

However, in late May 2021, President Biden instructed his intelligence officials to “redouble” efforts to investigate the origin of Covid-19, including the idea that it came from a lab in China. What had changed? It seems that investigations by the US intelligence community have so far been unable to come to a definitive conclusion as to the virus’s origin either. They felt there was evidence that could point to either a lab leak or the wet market, but not enough to settle on one or other cause. The fact that China was being secretive and uncooperative was raising suspicions, as was

new information, such as news that three WIV staff had been hospitalised with symptoms suggestive of Covid-19 as early as November 2019, two months before the first infections were supposed to have taken place. US diplomatic cables dating back to 2018 also came to light that raised concerns about the WIV’s biosecurity, while additional information on the first Wuhan infections revealed that not all the patients had an identifiable link to the wet market.

The credibility of the lab leak hypothesis was further enhanced by a carefully argued piece on the origin of Covid in the highly reputable *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in early May 2021. In this, science writer Nicholas Wade shreds the credibility of the two key statements from early 2020 that dismissed the idea of a laboratory origin. He condemns both as poor science and reveals that the *Lancet* letter had been instigated by Peter Daszak, President of the EcoHealth Alliance of New York, an organisation that had funded coronavirus research at the WIV, and so had a vested interest in diverting suspicion from the lab.

Is it likely then that WIV was carrying out experiments on coronaviruses that could have made them more deadly? In fact, it is known that they



were. There is a whole strand of research known as “gain of function” (GOF) that engineers known viruses to make them deadlier as a way of exploring their potential, with the intention of getting a head start on preventing diseases like Covid-19, or of investigating extinct diseases. GOF has been used to resurrect the lethal 1918 flu virus for research purposes, for example, and to increase the virulence of other flu strains in the lab. One experiment modified the bird flu virus to produce a virulent, deadly and highly contagious strain that swept through the lab’s experimental ferrets with alarming speed, with the researchers responsible describing it as “probably one of the most dangerous viruses you could make.”

This has caused significant disquiet in the scientific community; there is far from a consensus that this research is advisable or indeed, useful, with concern that even when done in labs with the highest level of containment, the escape of a dangerous virus was not completely impossible. The most rigorous biosecurity has been known to be breached by accidents or negligence; the smallpox virus has escaped three times from labs in England, causing 80 cases and three deaths, while the SARS1 virus leaked from laboratories in Singapore, Taiwan, and four times from the Chinese National Institute of Virology in Beijing. WIV was known to be carrying out GOF research engineering coronaviruses to attack human

cells in collaboration with US researchers, with the potential for an accidental leak to have set off the pandemic, not least because the research was being done in labs well below the WIV’s highest biosecurity level, level 4. The research was being done at biosecurity level 2, roughly equivalent to that followed in a dentist’s surgery.

This is not supposition; the work was funded by the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (the organisation now at the forefront of fighting Covid in the US) via the EcoHealth Alliance, and the funding application detailing the proposed work is a matter of public record. The three sick WIV staff all turned out to be connected with GOF research on coronaviruses at the lab too. Whether the research generated SARS2 cannot be ascertained, as the Chinese have sealed the lab records. Speaking of WIV’s GOF experiments, Wade says: “From the hindsight of 2021, one can say that the value of gain-of-function studies in preventing the SARS2 epidemic was zero. The risk was catastrophic.”

Given that China is unlikely to open access to the WIV records, the origin of SARS2 will probably never be unequivocally identified. However, the idea that it might have come from an accidental release of a human-manipulated coronavirus that was subsequently covered up, rather than natural transmission from animals to humans in a wet market, is beginning to look less like a fringe conspiracy theory and more like a potential

bioscience Chernobyl. It will be interesting to see what Biden’s “redoubled effort” will turn up, given that so many vested interests in the US are at stake if it does turn out to come from the Wuhan lab. *Science*, 8 Feb 2019; *vox.com*, 1 May; *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 5 May; *bbc.co.uk/news*, 27 May 2021.

VLAD THE VACCINATOR

Visitors to Bran Castle in Romania, which claims to be the inspiration for Dracula’s home in Bram Stoker’s novel, are more likely to end up with punctured arms than necks as medics have set up a Covid vaccination centre there. Doctors and nurses with fang stickers on their scrubs are offering shots to all visitors to the castle. At weekends in May, anyone could turn up and get a jab as well as free entry to the castle’s exhibit of 52 mediæval torture instruments. Staff are hoping the vaccination offer will bring more visitors to the castle after tourist numbers plummeted due to the pandemic. *www.yahoo.com/news* 8 May 2021

RIP BILL SHAKESPEARE

In late May, Bill Shakespeare, 81, the first man to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in the UK in December 2020, died of an unrelated condition. He was the second person in the UK to receive the jab, shortly after 91-year-old Margaret Keenan. His passing led to a surprising eulogy being broadcast on Argentine TV news when Noelia Novillo, a newsreader on Canal 26, confused Mr Shakespeare with his literary namesake. She reported that William Shakespeare, had died five months after receiving the Covid vaccine and added: “As we all know, he’s one of the most important writers in the English language – for me, the master. We’ve got news that has stunned all of us given the greatness of this man... We’re talking about William Shakespeare and his death. We’ll let you know how and why it happened.” Novillo later explained she had got confused by some missing punctuation in her text and had expressed herself badly, but not before the clip had gone viral on social media. *Guardian*, 28 May 2021.

SIDELINES...

BURIED ALIVE

An elderly paralysed woman was rescued after enduring three days buried in a shallow grave in China, dumped there by her son who said he was tired of caring for her. The woman, who was 79, could be heard calling faintly for help after her son’s wife alerted police to her disappearance in Shaanxi province. The son, Ma Lekuan, 58, was charged with attempted murder. *Times*, 9 May 2020.

SHRINKING MANHOOD

Environmental scientist Dr Shanna Swan has warned that pollution is making penises smaller. Dr Swan pins the blame on phthalates, a chemical used to soften plastics that has an effect on human hormones when absorbed by the body. It is directly linked to a surge in boys born with abnormally small genitals as exposure to phthalates in the womb can be correlated with “a smaller penis volume”. *Sun*, 25 Mar 2021.

PECULIAR POTHOLE

In Connacht, Ireland, a mysterious individual, believed to be an anti-dog fouling protestor, has been filling potholes in pavements with baked beans. *Sun*, 8 April 2021.

THREE AMIGOS

A baby emu, goat, and goose have formed an unlikely trio at an animal centre in Devizes, Wiltshire. They first bonded when the emu, Taz, was rejected by his parents and had to be hand-reared. He soon made friends with fellow residents Alfred the kid, born around the same time, and Wiggle, a goose chick. Alfred often gives Taz a gentle peck on the head, while Taz and Wiggle love to weave in and out of the goat’s legs. *Metro*, 1 Apr 2021.

LEGO LIFTED

Police in France are on the trail of a gang of international Lego thieves after they arrested a woman and two men stealing boxes of the bricks from a shop near Paris. The trio, who came from Poland, admitted being part of a gang who targeted the often valuable collectors’ sets of Lego to feed the fast-growing online market. This has soared during lockdown, as many adults now buy and build the more complex high-end sets. *D.Mail*, 31 Mar 2021.

DANIEL MIHAILESCU / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: The perfect place to get jabbed? People arrive at a vaccination centre at Bran Castle in Romania earlier this year.



SIDELINES...

CHIMNEY CAT

Piper, Caitlyn Wertenberger's 19lb (9kg) cat, went missing for 28 days before being found in her neighbour's chimney in Union Gap, Washington State, when new tenants moved into the empty apartment. After hearing meowing for five days, they invited Ms Wertenberger to search their home, where she found Piper. [UPI] 30 Mar 2021.

IN PLAIN SIGHT

A tiny new species of shrimp, smaller than a child's fingernail, has been found in a museum aquarium. It was identified when samples were sent from the Horniman Museum in Forest Hill, south London, to the University of Vienna for study. It was named *Heteromysis hornimani* – and has subsequently been found in aquaria in Poland and Paris, but not in the wild. Sun, 27 Mar 2021.

FAUX FAMILY

A divorced mother, whose two children chose to live with her ex-husband, replaced them with nine lifelike dolls. Liz Watson, 42, created a nursery for the £1,000 manikins at her home in Florida. Metro, 13 May 2021.

CAT'S NEST

A cat in Amersham, Buckinghamshire, was discovered raising her kittens up a tree in an old bird's nest. They were traced to the nest by Cats Protection League volunteer Ruth Goller after a week of detective work. The cats were found with a tomcat nearby apparently protecting them. Branch secretary Kathryn Graves said: "It is very unusual for a tomcat to stick around after kittens have been born – in fact, I've never seen it before." The cats, who have all been given bird-related names, were caught, given medical treatment and handed over to fosterers. BBC News, 18 May 2021.



MARTIN ROSS

RED TAPE CASUALTIES | Ark runs aground and Eiffel Tower toppled



MAURICE SAVAGE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The Dutch Noah's Ark has been stranded in Ipswich since 2019. BELOW: Nick and Bernie Charman with their Eiffel Tower.

NOAH'S ARK STUCK IN IPSWICH

A full-size replica of Noah's Ark is at the centre of an escalating international incident after being stranded in Ipswich docks since November 2019. The 70m (230ft) long Ark, which houses a biblical museum, was towed over to Ipswich from its base in the Netherlands and is docked at Orwell Quay, but has been unable to leave due to a dispute with the UK coastguard. The £2.6million attraction, owned by Dutch TV producer Aad Peters, has been impounded by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). They deem the vessel unseaworthy as it is 61 years old and does not have the required certification, and will not release it until the work to obtain the correct certification has been done. The owners, on the other hand, maintain that the Ark has always been categorised as a "non-certified floating object" that does not need to comply with international regulations, only leaving its home country on an "infrequent and exceptional basis". They are desperate to leave Ipswich, not

The Ark's owners maintain it is a "non-certified floating object"

right documentation on the required timescales would incur unreasonable costs. They are attempting to get permission for a one-off voyage back to the Netherlands, but the MCA will not budge, leading to wrangling between British and Dutch authorities that has culminated in the issue being referred to the UK's transport secretary, Grant Shapps, for adjudication. Meanwhile, Noah's Ark remains stuck in Ipswich. East Anglian Daily Times, 4 June 2021.

EIFFEL-TOWER-ON-SEA

Nick Charman, 56, of St-Leonards-on-Sea, near Hastings in East Sussex, had planned to visit Paris with his wife Bernie to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their honeymoon in the French capital in 1995. When 2020's Covid lockdown and ban on international travel put paid to his plans, he decided instead to build a replica Eiffel Tower and install it in their front garden. But the unromantic local council have told him to remove the tower as it contravenes planning regulations. hastingsobserver.co.uk, 22 Feb 2021.



HASTINGS OBSERVER / SWINS

least because they are accruing a £500 a day fine all the while the Ark remains impounded, but insist that getting the



MEDICAL BAG

A multiple happy event in Morocco and a linguistic transformation from 1985



ABOVE: A member of the medical staff surveys one of nine babies born to a Malian woman in a hospital in Casablanca, Morocco.

MALIAN NONUPLETS

On 4 May Halima Cisse, from Timbuktu in Mali, gave birth to nine babies in a Moroccan hospital where the Malian government had sent her for specialist care – they were expecting seven babies, but the ultrasound scan missed two. Cisse was admitted to the hospital at 25 weeks, and the medics managed to extend her pregnancy to 30 weeks before she gave birth via caesarean section. The nonuplets, five girls and four boys, weighed between 500g and 1kg (1.1lb and 2.2lb) and all survived but are expected to remain in incubators for two or three months.

“The mother and babies are doing well so far,” Mali’s health minister, Fanta Siby, told Agence France-Presse. Halima’s pregnancy had captured the imagination of Mali, even when it was thought she was ‘only’ going to produce septuplets, and the government stepped in to arrange and fund Cisse’s medical care. The babies’ father, Adjutant Kader Arby, remained in Mali with the couple’s older daughter, but told BBC Afrique he had kept in touch with his wife and was optimistic about the future. “God gave us these children; he is the one to decide

what will happen to them. I’m not worried about that. When the almighty does something, he knows why,” he said.

Before Halima Cisse’s nonuplets, the record for the most children delivered at a single birth to survive was held by Nadya Suleman, who gave birth to octuplets in California aged 33 in 2009 after fertility treatment. Two cases of nonuplets have been recorded previously, one to 29-year-old Geraldine Broderick in Australia in 1971 and another to Zurina Mat Saad in Malaysia in 1999, but many of the babies were stillborn and none survived more than a few days.

Multiple births like these almost never occur naturally and usually result from fertility treatments, although, according to Youssef Alaoui, medical director of the Ain Borja clinic in Casablanca where Cisse gave birth, she was not undergoing any fertility treatment when she conceived. In Africa, fertility drugs are often prescribed when a woman comes off a hormonal form of contraceptive, said Kenyan gynaecologist Dr Bill Kalumi. This can then result in the release of several eggs, instead of one, during ovulation,

increasing the possibility of multiple births. *Guardian*, 5 May; *BBC News*, 6 May; *New York Post*, 6 May 2021.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

A remarkable story from 35 years ago was sent to Fortean Towers recently by Roger Morgan. Sarah Sarracino, 15, one of three children of a very wealthy Protestant family in Naples, had a sudden transformation. She spoke for only 10 minutes a day, and in a strange mixture of English, Spanish, French, Latin and biblical Hebrew. Her mother said she had stopped eating and sleeping, and her hands were as cold as ice. At the time of the news report (*Evening Standard*, 28 Nov 1985), she was being examined by scientists, psychologists and teachers from her school. According to her brother Marco, 16, who appeared to be the only person capable of translating her utterances, she said: “It is not for my glory that I speak. Truth will come for all eternity.” Her mother said: “Sara is not mad, of that I am certain. She never knew any of the languages she speaks – but we can no longer communicate with her because she no longer speaks Italian.”

SIDELINES...

SERPENT CRUELTY

A woman in Ghana whose husband died after his pet python bit his tongue as he put it in his mouth has buried the python alive with her husband’s body. In social media footage, the widow is seen dancing round the coffin with the snake. Burying people with their favourite possessions is apparently a tradition in Ghana. *Metro*, 12 May 2021.

JUST TOO LATE

Steven Smith, 41, who was adopted, spent decades searching for his birth mother. DNA tests finally led to a sister, who gave him an address for his mother, Daphne Morfydd Jones, in Bethnal Green, east London. Visiting the house the day before Mother’s Day, he found a pile of unopened letters on the doorstep and his mother’s body in the bathroom. “She’d been dead a while, heart attack apparently,” he said. *Sunday People*, 16 May 2021.

HAT-TRICK

A Kurdish boy, born in Duhok, Iraq, is the first recorded human to be born with three penises, a condition known as triphalis. The two additional penises were surgically removed with no adverse effect. *<i>*, 5 April 2021.

RAT A TATT

Jimmy Ames, 37, got the Chinese symbol for “love” tattooed on his arm to mark his 2017 wedding to Michaela, 34. It joined an existing Chinese tattoo from a lads’ holiday in Miami – of his birth year animal. Weeks later, the father of two, a business manager from Ipswich, remembered he was born in the year of the rat, so he now has “love rat” tattooed on his arm. *Sun*, 11 May 2021.

TARGET PISTOL

The Target superstore chain in the US has suspended sales of Pokémon and sports trading cards in its stores after a man drew a gun in a fight over trading cards at a branch in Wisconsin. During the pandemic, the sale of trading cards has rocketed, and values of rare ones have risen steeply. eBay says sales of Pokémon cards in the US shot up 574% and football cards by 1,586% between 2019 and 2020, with a rare Charizard Pokémon card selling for nearly \$400,000. *BBC News*, 15 May 2021.



SIDELINES...

THE WRONG MAN

A drug dealer arrested in Clam Lake, Michigan, confidently gave police a false name, which turned out to be that of a man wanted for other crimes in the area. *D.Star*, 11 April 2021.

SEX MACHINE

Misheck Nyandoro, 66, who has 16 wives and 151 children, is to marry again, because the older women complain he wants sex too often. The retired Zimbabwean war veteran, who started his "polygamy project" in 1983, sleeps with four women every night. "I go to the bedrooms on my schedule," he said. "I satisfy my wife and move on to the next room. This is my job. I have no other job." *Sun, Metro*, 11 May 2021.

BABY BARGAIN

Police in the West Midlands are investigating a report that a man tried to buy a baby from a woman in the street in Dudley. The woman was walking with her baby in a stroller when a man approached her and asked to buy the child, obstructing her path and trying to undo the pushchair's safety belts. The woman and her baby escaped unharmed after she pushed the man away and turned the stroller round. *Independent*, 14 May 2021.

LOCAL EMOTIONS

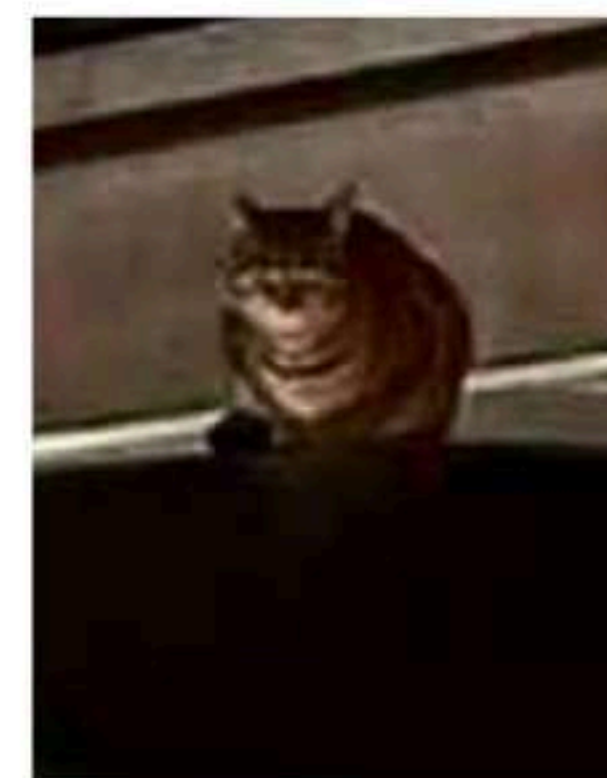
A study has found that music in a minor key only sounds sad to Westerners; how emotion is processed in songs depends on cultural conditioning. Western culture is programmed to find tunes played in a minor key melancholic and those in a major key uplifting. *D.Telegraph*, 14 Jan 2021.



MARTIN ROSS

NEAR CATASTROPHIES

Tabby halts train and black cat bounces back



LEFT AND ABOVE: The troublesome tabby that delayed a train's departure from Euston station. BELOW: This black cat used up at least one of its nine lives in a death-defying leap from a Chicago apartment building.

CAT ON A FAST TRAIN ROOF

Passengers on board a London to Manchester train at Euston station were forced to disembark about half an hour before its scheduled departure time of 9pm. This was due not to a mechanical fault with the train itself, nor to signal failure on the route ahead, nor even leaves on the line or the fabled "wrong type of snow".

No, the reason for the Avanti West Coast train's customers being compelled to transfer onto a replacement train was a cat on their original train's roof. A tabby was spotted curled up on top of the train and, despite the best efforts of station staff, refused to move. The nonchalant feline was dangerously close to the 25,000-volt overhead lines, and, if it had escaped being electrocuted,

would then have faced a 125mph three-hour ride *en plein air*.

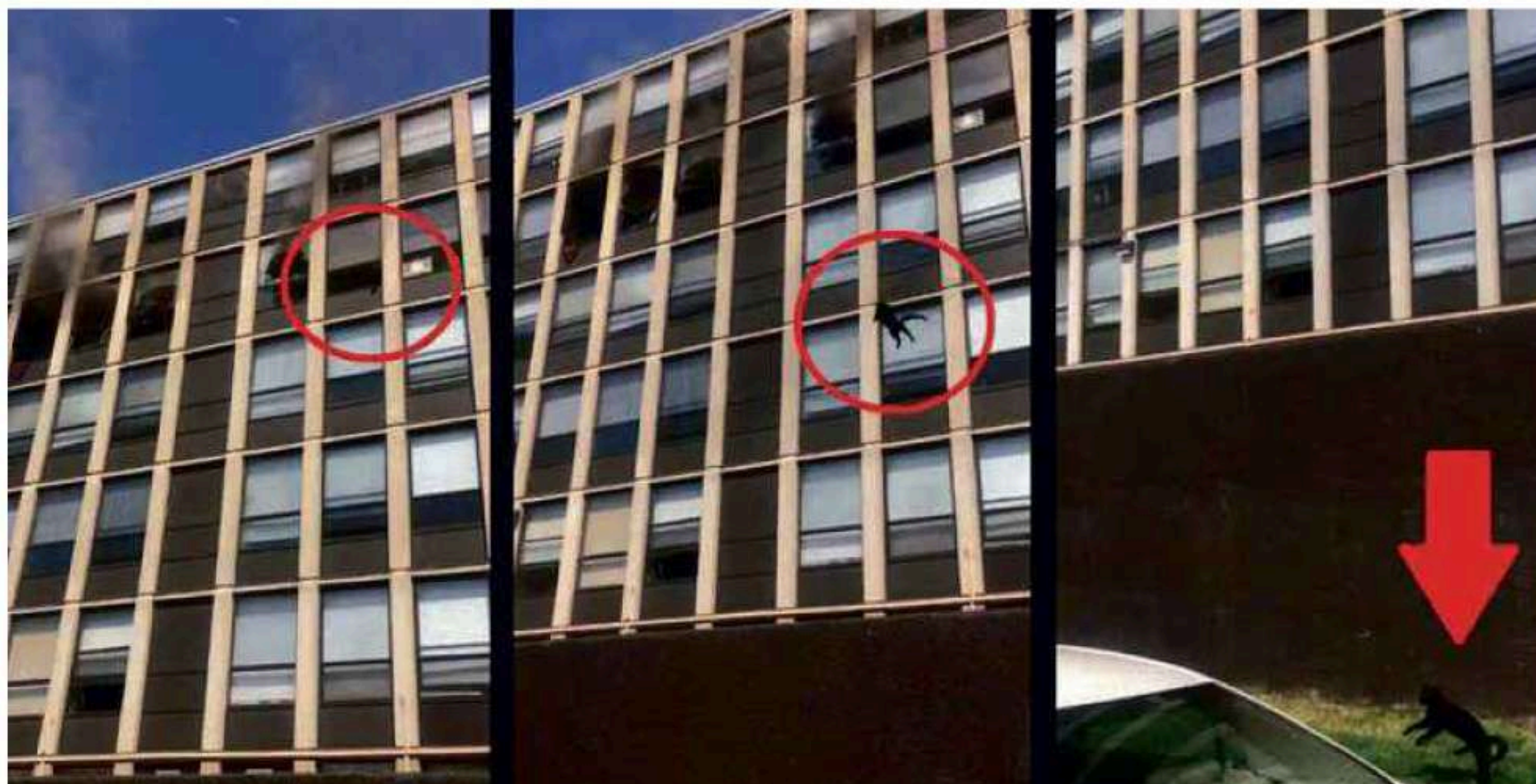
Eventually, after two and a half hours, the stubborn moggy was coaxed down from its perilous perch when a large refuse bin was placed alongside the carriage, giving it a platform on which to climb down.

According to station staff, the cat appeared supremely unbothered; it was described as "swaggering off" into the night. It is still not known how it managed to get on top of the train in the first place. "We often have to deal with birds inside the station, but in all my time here this is the first train-surfing cat!" commented Joe Hendry, Network Rail station manager for Euston. "Thankfully, curiosity didn't kill this cat and we're glad it avoided using up one

of its nine lives." *Guardian*, 4 Mar 2021.

CHICAGO'S BOUNCING CAT

While attending an apartment fire in Chicago, firefighters were surprised to see a black cat appear at the smoke-filled broken window. After briefly testing the wall with its paws, the cat leapt from the building. It fell five floors, missed a wall, landed on all four paws on a patch of grass, bounced once and ran away. "She went under my car and hid until she felt better after a couple of minutes and came out and tried to scale the wall to get back in," said fire department spokesman Larry Langford. Langford is now trying to find the cat's owner to reunite them. *Guardian*, 14 May 2021.



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PAUL DEVEREUX considers a pair of unusual burials and an example of Neanderthal needlework



FERNANDO FUEYO

SLEEP TIGHT, MTOTO

Inside the Panga ya Saidi cave in the coastal highlands of Kenya, archaeologists have made a touching find some three metres (10ft) below the cave floor – the thoughtful burial of a toddler who they have named Mtoto (Swahili for child). It was a tender burial. It seems the small body had been wrapped tightly before being laid into a carefully dug, shallow and circular pit. The child was curled up on its side, as if to sleep or to keep warm, with its tiny head delicately placed on a support of some kind. The special interest concerning this find is that it is 78,000 years old, representing the earliest deliberate burial of a modern human yet found in Africa. “Only humans treat the dead with this respect, this care, this tenderness,” said palaeoanthropologist Maria Martínón-Torres, director of the National Centre for Research on Human Evolution (CENIAH) in Burgos, Spain, who led the team that first discovered the ancient burial. “This is some of the earliest evidence that we have in Africa about humans living in the physical and also in the symbolic world.”

The Panga ya Saidi cave is still revered as a sacred place by local Kenyans, and is also a key archaeological site containing remains covering a vast time period and so has been subject to archaeological enquiry for a number of years. Fragments of Mtoto’s bones were first found during excavations in 2013, but it wasn’t until 2017 that the small pit containing the bones was fully revealed. “At this point, we weren’t sure what we had found. The bones were just too delicate to study in the field,” says Dr Emmanuel Ndiema of the National Museums of Kenya. In fact, the bones were finally excavated from the cave in a block of stabilised sediment and flown to the Max Planck Institute in Jena, Germany, and ultimately to CENIAH for detailed technical analysis. Because the finds were too old for

carbon dating, a technique called optically stimulated luminescence was used which measures when rock or sediment last saw sunlight. This placed the grave soil at around 78,000 years old.

The clearly loved Mtoto may only have had a brief life, but she is now causing a bit of a fuss these long ages after her death. *LiveScience*, 5 May; *Ars Technica*, 5 May 2021.

BIRD BRAIN-TEASER

The skeleton of a girl discovered in 1967/68 by archaeologist Waldemar Chmielewski in the Tunel Wielki Cave, southern Poland (below), has only now been given a detailed analysis. New radiocarbon dating shows the find to be about 300 years old, that the girl was 10-12 years old when she died, and her DNA indicates that she came from northern Europe, perhaps Finland or western Russia. From 1655 to 1657, the area was occupied by troops led by Charles X Gustav of Sweden, including soldiers from Finland and Karelia, stationed at Ojców Castle near a forest where the burial cave was situated. These soldiers often travelled with their families. However, Europeans stopped burying their dead in caves during the Middle Ages, making the burial of this girl highly unusual, said the researchers.

Even more unusual was that she had the skull of a finch in her mouth, along with a second bird skull deposited alongside the remains. “Among many cultures, the souls of children have been conceived in the form of small birds,” the researchers wrote. “Nevertheless, in the period in question, birds were never

deposited in graves, let alone being placed in the mouth of the deceased.” The girl’s bones showed signs of arrested growth in later years, possibly the result of a metabolic disease. There was no evidence of trauma, nor any clues about how she died. No grave goods, aside from the bird heads, were found. *Præhistorische Zeitschrift*, 29 May 2021.

DARN IT

Sometimes it is the small things uncovered by archaeological investigation that speak volumes about peoples of the past. For example, in caves and rock shelters in Kermanshah province, western Iran, archaeologists led by Saman Heydari-Guran have found clues dating back to late Palaeolithic times indicating that the Neanderthals there knew at least the basics of sewing. Clues include a bone needle in the context of what seems to be the preparation of a wolf skin fabric. “The effect of incision caused by hitting a stone tool on a wolf bone is very rare in ancient Palaeolithic sites, and such incision on the phalanx bone is linked with the process of preparing animal skin based on previous cases discovered across the world,” explains Heydari-Guran.

If confirmed with further research, this would appear to be another step in the intellectual ‘rehabilitation’ of the Neanderthals from being considered as grunting near-apes to being more advanced creatures. Evidence accumulates of their ability to speak simple language (even to sing!), for instance, and to be able to make symbolic markings and actions. *Tehran Times*, 8 May 2021.



WARSAW UNIVERSITY



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

261: STOP KIDDING

“The helplessness of a human infant outlasts the suckling period of a wolf.” – Fort, *Books*, p689

Fort (himself childless) was here amassing cases of feral children lupinely suckled. Such tales, of course, go back to Romulus and Remus. If Fort had read Livy, he’d surely have chuckled over the rival version in which the maternal she-wolf was actually a local tart, *lupa* being a Roman slang term for prostitutes (cf. *lupanar* = brothel)

In an uncharacteristically tender moment, Juvenal (*Satires* 14, v47) urged *maxima debetur puero reverentia*, Englished without attribution by Samuel Johnson (*Rambler* 4, 1750) as “the highest degree of reverence should be paid to youth,” a filching unnoticed by (e.g.) David Wormersley’s annotated Penguin.

Now, it is possible to find such reverence, for example, on tombstones cf. Richmond Lattimore’s *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (1962, pp187-97), or in Pliny’s touching tribute (*Letters*, bk5 no16) to a friend’s daughter who died just before 13 – with typical Roman precision, her age is inscriptionally given (*ILS*, no1030) as 12 years, 11 months, 7 days: she was already engaged, with wedding day fixed – Step Forward, Jerry Lee Lewis.

Musing over the Charlie Gard case, classicist Peter Jones (*Spectator*, 22 July 2017) contrasted modern compassion with the (allegedly) harsher Roman attitude, observing that only a handful of 55,000 epitaphs record deaths under six months, quoting Cicero’s deprecation of undue grief over infant deaths, even claiming there was no word for baby in Latin.

This semantic claim exaggerates. *Fetus* demonstrably can mean this, and there was also *Infans*. And Cicero is balanced by (of all people) Nero, “as immoderate in grief as in joy” (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk15 ch23) over the death of his four-month-old baby (*infans*) daughter.

Horror stories begin early, in literature and myth: Hector’s baby son flung from the walls of Troy; Medea slaughtering their children (albeit for different reasons, Joseph and Magda Goebbels come to mind) to punish Jason for playing away (she incinerated the girlfriend with a poisoned wedding-dress); Oedipus with his ankles pierced (hence his name) and exposed.

Sparta exposed babies judged sickly by government officials on Mt Taygetus. A wife in Terence’s play *The Self-Tormentor* (vv626-8) was told by hubby to dispose of a new child, if female. An absent Egyptian



wrote (*Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 744) to his expectant wife: “If the child is male, rear it; if a girl, expose it” – newspapers frequently report such atrocities from rural China and elsewhere.

The frequently doubted belief that Carthaginians sacrificed young children to Baal has been vindicated by Oxford classicist Josephine Quinn (*Antiquity* 87, 2013, 1199-1207 – see online digest). Mass baby cemeteries found (e.g.) at Hamilton (1912) and Ashkelon (Israel, 2014) point the same way, being judged healthy by modern medicos. One here thinks of the baby-burnings by Teutonic Knights in Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*, taken from mediæval Russian chronicles.

Horace (*Epode* 8) describes the cognate crime of notorious witches Canada and Sagana ritually killing a young boy in Rome in pre-Satanist style.

Ultimate horror: the barbecuing of a royal baby (and mother) by Alexander’s mother, Olympias – despite this, she features as an Albanian heroine in the communist-produced *Fjalori Enciklopedik Shqiptar* (1985, p773): Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, bk8 ch7 para7).

Disgruntled Thracian mercenaries massacred the schoolchildren at their desks in the village of Mykalessos (Thucydides, bk7 ch29).

In siege-starved cities, babies were first on the menu. At Numantia (Spain, 133 BC), dead women were found clutching half-eaten infants: Petronius, *Satyricon*, ch141 para11). Josephus (*Jewish War*, bk6 ch207) reports a certain Mary who killed, roasted, and ate half her baby, offering the rest to

hungry soldiers, saying: “If you disapprove, leave it for me” – they did.

It was normal to liquidate highborn children deemed to pose a political threat. Thus, Octavian-Augustus with Cæsarion (son of Cæsar and Cleopatra); Nero had his stepson drowned in the Tiber while fishing. The assassins of Caligula (Suetonius, ch59) dashed his infant daughter’s brains out against a wall.

Byzantine empress Irene, though, went well beyond the extra mile by having her son blinded in order to usurp him – Not a Good Night, Irene...

Disconcertingly common were births of horribly deformed children. Late Roman author Julius Obsequens in his *Book of Prodigies* (extracted from Livy) provides the following grim catalogue: Boy with four hands and feet; a girl without hands; children with four hands and feet; boy with four hands, four feet, four eyes, four ears, double genitals; boy with exposed intestines and sealed anus (“He gave a cry and died”); boy with three hands and feet; girl with two heads, four hands and feet, double genitals; boy “with no opening in his private parts where liquid is excreted.”

Young children were subject to sexual abuse. Trimalchio (Petronius, ch75 para2) recalls at 14 being the plaything of both master and mistress. In the same novel, a young boy is seduced and violated, and a seven-year-old slave-girl ritually deflowered. In real life, emperor Commodus was besotted with an eight-year-old lad, his constant bed-companion.

(Pæderasty was ubiquitously legal in Greece and Rome. This odious activity cannot be avoided. I space-savily direct readers to Athenæus (*Deipnosophists*, bk13) and Strato (*Greek Anthology*, bk12) for unblushing catalogues of practitioners and their nonce-sensical pleasures)

Outdoing even Jimmy Savile was Tiberius, said by a disgusted (and disbelieving) Suetonius to have trained newborn babies to fellate him in his swimming pool. He also (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk6 ch1) “defiled freeborn children,” having them abducted by force to his den of vice on Capri.

An unpromising theme for an upbeat ending to this ghastly litany. However, one may be had from an old dictionary definition of *Sellarium*, coined along with *Spintria* (Sphincter) to denote these Tiberian activities: “Lewdness Practised On A Settle” – how many curious dictionary-grubbing schoolboys looking this up would be any the wiser?

EXHIBITION REPORT

ALICE: CURIUSER AND CURIUSER

Flinging a hedgehog across the Queen of Hearts' croquet ground turns out to be strangely satisfying, says **DAVID V BARRETT** at the V&A's new exhibition

Lewis Carroll's two *Alice* books were probably the first introduction for many of us to the weird and wonderful, to absurdity and contradiction, to the Other. The young Charles Dodgson's headmaster wrote that the 12-year-old was "marvellously ingenious in replacing the ordinary inflexions of nouns and verbs... by... convenient forms of his own devising." He thought this would soon pass; we can be grateful he was wrong. The *Alice* books are a joy and a delight – as is the *Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser* exhibition at London's V&A museum.

It's an exercise in surreality, though it starts conventionally enough, with dozens of very small original drawings for the *Alice* books, mainly by John Tenniel, but also by Carroll/Dodgson. Both were perfectionists; Carroll binned the entire first run of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* because they were poorly printed, and paid for a new edition.

This is an adult exhibition; a few exhibits in cases are aimed at children – a dodo skeleton, a clock, a chessboard – though nowhere near as many as at the V&A's *Winnie-the-Pooh* exhibition a few years ago. Here it's more a case of a few things at child height, with "Things to do" and "Did you know...?" Kids will enjoy the exhibition – it's bright and colourful and fun – but it's not really designed for them.

Although there have been more recent interpretations by artists from Max Ernst to Salvador Dalí to Ralph Steadman to Gerald Scarfe, it's Tenniel's drawings that we will always associate with Alice. For the first book they took him two years to perfect, and he drew inspiration from the "real"



TOP: Photograph of the 'real' Alice Liddell, by Julia Margaret Cameron, 'Pomona', albumen print, 1872.

RIGHT: Zenaïda Yanowsky as The Red Queen in Christopher Wheeldon's ballet *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* at The Royal Ballet.

BELOW: The White Rabbit. An illustration for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by John Tenniel, 1865.

Alice, Alice Liddell. The little girl who prompted the books became a strong-minded and adventurous woman. At 19 she went on the Grand Tour with her sisters, making sketches around Europe for their tutor, John Ruskin, to assess. She hung out with Bohemians on the Isle of Wight, she met Queen Victoria and she married a wealthy cricketer, Reginald Hargreaves. She



stares out at us, disconcertingly, knowingly, from Julia Margaret Cameron's 1872 photograph.

Alice kept in touch with Dodgson until his death in 1898. As an elderly but stately lady in 1932, two



years before her own death, she travelled to the USA on a much-publicised trip to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Dodgson's birth – and to be awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Columbia University.

Alice has been endlessly reinterpreted by other artists in other media; the first stage version was in 1876, and the books were adapted into an operetta in 1886. The exhibition has a multitude of posters and extracts from films; the first film adaptation was as early as 1903, a 10-minute silent movie with trick photography to show Alice shrinking and changing shape. There is, of course, a series of distorting mirrors in the exhibition.

There's plenty of visual distortion. One room features a grinning Cheshire Cat – or a Cheshire Cat's grin – above a truly disorientating swirly floor that could have been painted by Bridget Riley. Artists of all styles have been entranced and inspired by Alice; in 1924 André Breton, founder of the Surrealist movement, said: "everyone has the power to accompany an ever more beautiful Alice to Wonderland." In another medium, Jefferson Airplane recorded a hippie classic with "White Rabbit" in 1967; there's film of them performing it, though it could have done with being larger and higher quality.

We have Alice in political metaphor (Boris Johnson was depicted as the White Rabbit with the title "Alice in Blunderland" in a cartoon in the *Times* earlier this year); Alice on TV (Jonathan Miller's Christmas 1966 BBC production, with Peter Cook as the Mad Hatter and Peter Sellers as the King of Hearts); Alice in fashion (the Alice band – and wonderful outfits for many of the characters); and perhaps most of all the concept of *being* Alice, in our curiosity, our independence, our desire to view things differently.

About the hedgehogs, and viewing things differently... Don a Covid-safe headset, and you're taken to the Queen of Hearts'



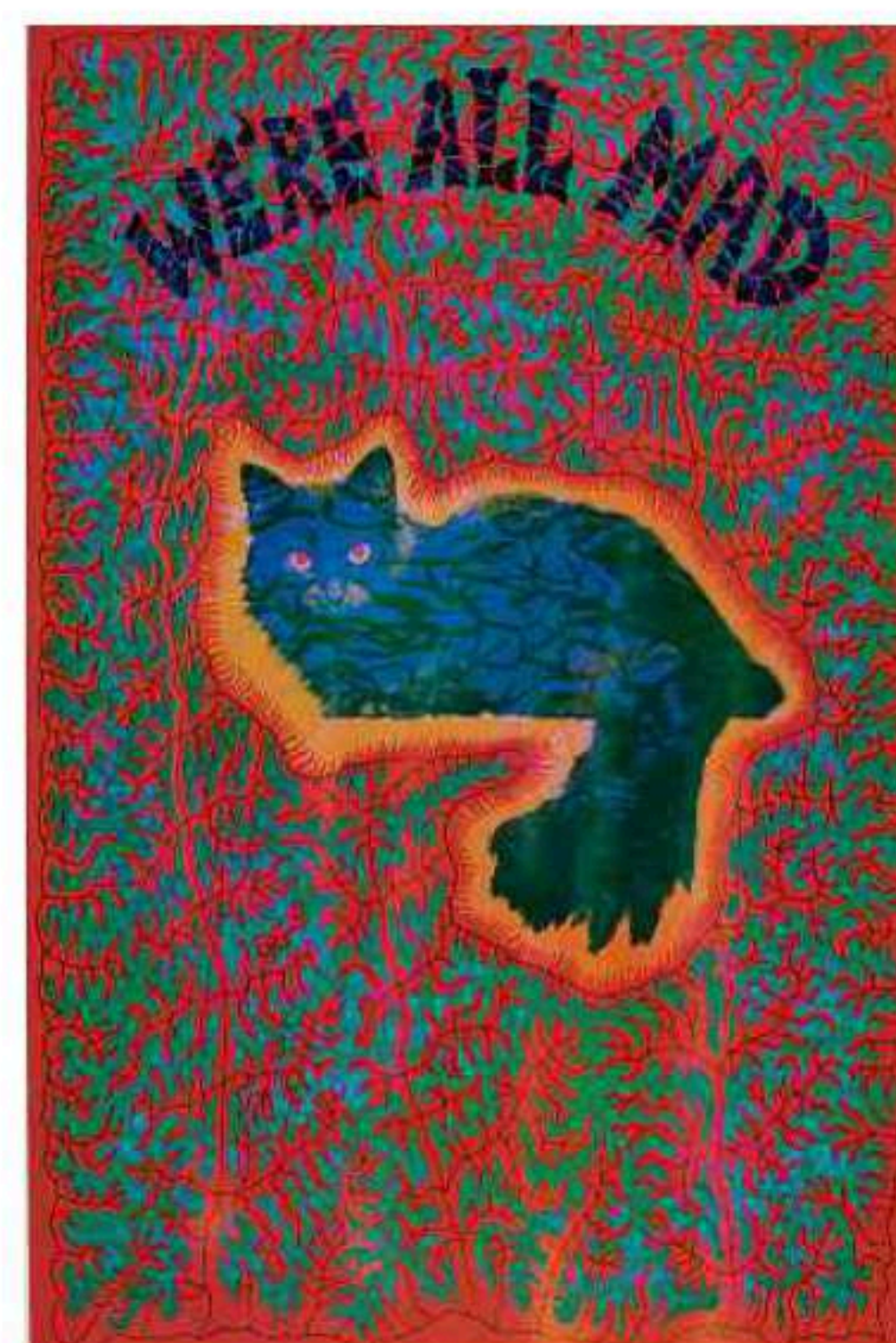
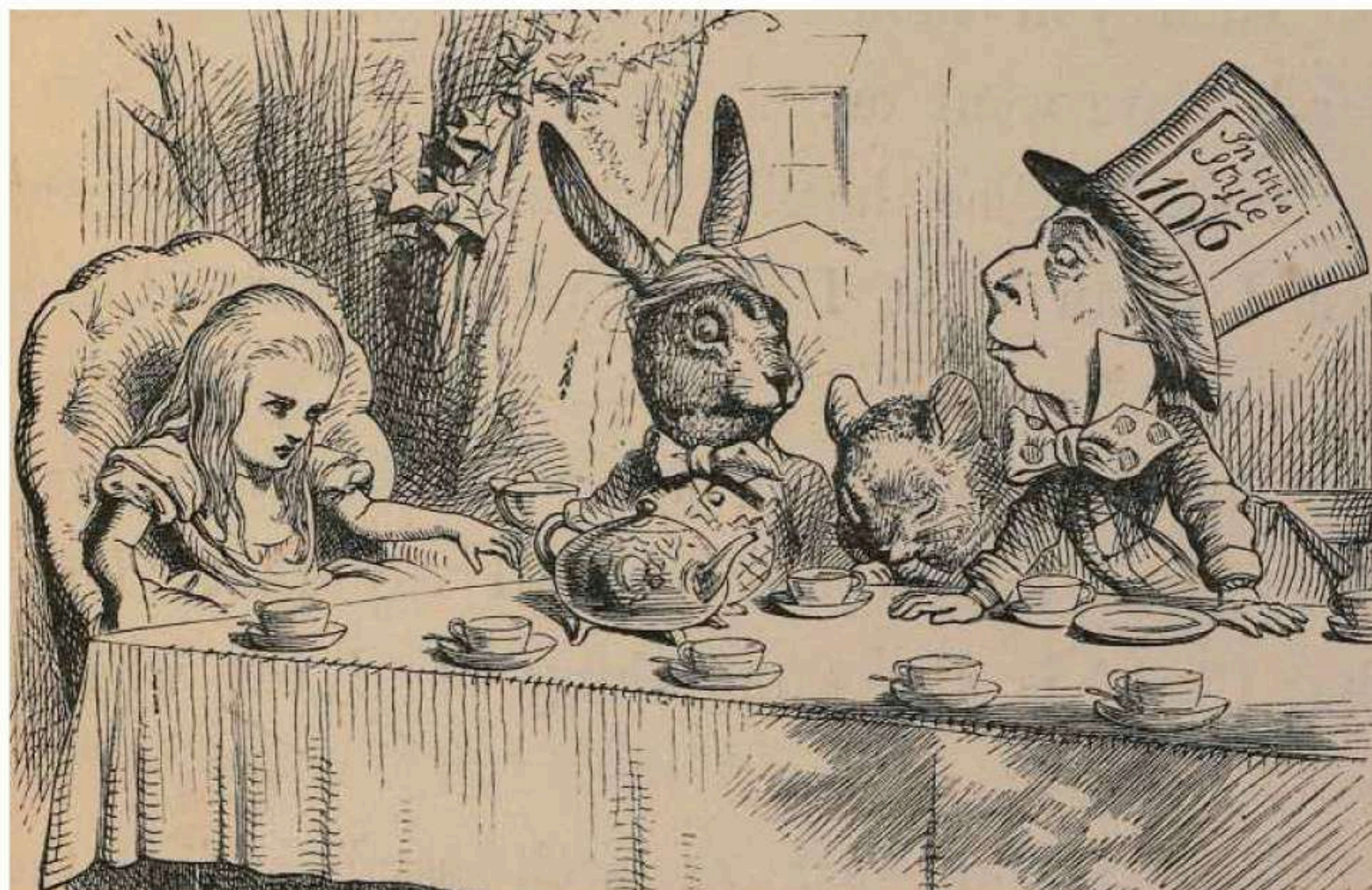
croquet match. A shallow bowl in front of you holds a couple of hedgehogs; reach in, grab one, and throw it as far as you can – it's wonderfully therapeutic! The hedgehog even returns and hops back in the dish, ready to be flung again. There are flamingos to your side, which really you should be using as croquet mallets, but they're not doing much except being skittery; I asked the V&A person who had overseen the VR display, and she said, with some disappointment, that they had tried, but just couldn't get the graphics right. One word of advice: make sure you focus the headset carefully before you start; there's nothing worse than a blurry hedgehog...

Perhaps the most stunning piece in the exhibition has a figure in a feathered dress standing within a moving sculpture of discs on spindles, rotating around a circular frame – the Infinity Dress and the Omniverse sculpture by Iris van Herpen and Anthony Howe. Van Herpen had been inspired by her visits to CERN in Switzerland, which has an ALICE Project of its own, A Large Ion Collider Experiment. As the catalogue says: "Alice's journey into Wonderland is also used as a metaphor for the scientists' own journey to discover more about our universe."

The final room is the most disturbing of all, and probably needs a warning for people prone to epileptic episodes. Mirrors, flashing lights and streams of text surround you as you wander through it.

The book, like the exhibition, is bright and cheerful and fun, starting with a colourful 60-page reimagining of the Alice story by artist Kristjana S Williams. It's more a companion volume than a conventional catalogue of the exhibition; there are lots of posters and stills from both stage and screen productions and (this being the V&A) many costumes as well. For two more new books on Alice, see p65.

Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser is at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, until 31 December.



TOP: Alice at the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. An illustration for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by John Tenniel, 1865. **ABOVE LEFT:** A swirly Cheshire Cat, one of many installations exploring themes and images from the *Alice* books. **ABOVE RIGHT:** 'Cheshire cat', psychedelic poster by Joseph McHugh, published by East Totem West, USA, 1967. **LEFT:** The Infinity Dress and the Omniverse Sculpture.

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

BOTH: VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON



Ghostly bailiffs

ALAN MURDIE hears a knock at the door, foreboding footsteps and a voice demanding entry...



WELLCOME LIBRARY, LONDON

ABOVE: A drunken man sits at home with his family while bailiffs remove their furniture in an 1847 etching by George Cruikshank

Unwanted knocks on the door at strange hours, tramping feet around one's home and a sinister voice demanding entry.

What sounds like the start of a ghost or horror story is unfortunately a scenario soon to be acted out many times every day across the country in the flesh, with bailiffs and Sheriff's Officers from the High Court (now both styled as 'enforcement agents' in legislation since 2007) resuming visits after various suspensions and moratoria.

Having worked myself as a lawyer acting on behalf of debtors in enforcement cases from the beginning of the 1990s, I grasped this parallel between bailiffs and malevolent supernatural entities early on, immediately finding an analogy between the rights of entry for bailiffs and the powers of entities in the (rather synthetic) lore of vampirology for gaining access to your home. Traditionally, to enter a

To enter a property, vampires must be invited in, or find an open door or window

property, vampires must either be invited in, or find an already open door, window, crack or crevice.

And with a few exceptions, it is much the same with bailiffs in England and Wales for the past 400 years. Ever since *Semayne's Case* in 1603, the origin of the maxim "An Englishman's home is his castle", the outer door of the home of the debtor is protected and cannot be broken down. *Semayne's Case* [1603] 77 Eng. Rep. 194 remains good law in the 21st century, the only exceptions being debts

claimed by the Inland Revenue and unpaid criminal fines since 2004. Even then, forced entry (using a locksmith) is rarely ever attempted.

Otherwise, the householder is entitled to keep the door locked and refuse entry, since a bailiff collecting a civil debt can only enter peacefully. This is a fundamental protection afforded a householder and one that once played a key role in getting rid of a ghost.

Back in 2009 I was asked to advise in a case of an elderly widow living in Enfield, north London, who sought my advice on two problems: one was a dispute over her deceased husband's council tax. The other was visitation by a ghost.

I will call the lady Mrs G. Originally of Indian origin, she was aged 77 and a widow. She had lived in the United Kingdom for many years, pursuing a career as a hospital nurse before retirement. A

sensible and independent woman, she had lived alone in her present home since 1997, regularly visited by adult children and a teenage granddaughter.

In 2008 Enfield Council began chasing her over an unpaid council tax demand they said was owed by her late husband, from whom she had been separated for many years, though never formally divorcing. He had died in 2006 and two years later, much to the surprise of Mrs G, she found herself served back-dated bills for thousands of pounds owed on the property where they had once lived as man and wife, which he had neglected to pay. She protested to the Council, who ignored her pleas and summoned her to court. She complained to her MP and the case was then referred to me. It proved possible to get her case adjourned in court, pending an appeal to a little-known body, the Valuation Tribunal for England. This was partly successful and an arrangement was reached enabling her to pay a remainder of the balance. This happened and Mrs G then had to go to hospital for surgery. I thought that was the end of the matter.

However, just over a month later I was contacted by Mrs G's granddaughter. She asked me to urgently telephone her grandmother as further complications with debt demands had arisen. And if that was not bad enough, Mrs G believed her house was now haunted. I immediately headed to Enfield, since both debt problems and active haunted houses demand a swift response. I found Mrs G's modern bungalow located in a quiet residential street, where she proceeded to tell me of the new debt problem and the strange experience of hearing footsteps, which she first heard on the night of 24/25th June 2009 when she woke up suddenly at around 2am.

As she lay in bed, she heard sounds like heavy footsteps marching up the front path to the door, very purposefully. Her bungalow possessed two entry doors, a glass outer porch door and a main front door, which she always locked at night. Half expecting the doorbell to ring, she was astonished to hear neither door open and the footsteps stride straight through into her hallway. There was a brief pause, a scraping noise that she interpreted as the wiping of feet on the doormat, and then the steps resumed down her hallway. It sounded "just like a big man wearing boots" passing by her bedroom door and heading inside. Realising the nocturnal trespasser could not be flesh and blood, she began to pray fervently, concluding it must be a spirit, albeit one shod in large boots. The prayer literally seemed to stop the spectre in its tracks; the pacing



steps ceasing at exactly the moment she completed her prayer.

Altogether, I found Mrs G seemed remarkably calm about hearing footsteps inside her home in the middle of the night. It transpired she was a devout Christian, worshipping regularly at her local Anglican church, and the thought of wandering ghosts did not alarm her. Readily accepting a spiritual dimension to existence, she explained that during her nursing career she had attended many hundreds of seriously ill and dying patients over the years and had no fear of the dead.

She believed her ghost to be the returning spirit of the former occupant, an elderly man who had died in the bungalow on 31 December 1996 and so quite harmless. "It's the living you have to worry about," she calmly observed.

Mrs G struck me as a sensible and truthful person, one not likely to be prone to flights of fancy. She spoke of recently undergoing major surgery and still convalescing, but had not been prescribed

any medicines likely to trigger hallucinatory episodes.

What was proving altogether more vexing for her was the resumption of her dispute with Enfield Council, which she felt had reached an acute stage. Despite reaching an instalment arrangement, the authority, whether by accident or design, had now decided to demand the entire sum, instructing its bailiffs while she had been in hospital. So far, they had not yet called, but issued a series of menacing letters threatening to turn up with a van and remove goods. Computer generated, such missives are routine in debt collection, and all too often they mislead debtors and exaggerate the powers bailiffs actually possess. Never having experienced anything like this before, she was understandably distressed by these communications. Looking at the date on these letters, I realised they had started arriving shortly before her experience of hearing footsteps in her home.

To reassure Mrs G, I advised her that bailiffs could not force entry for civil debts, recommending she kept her door locked against all comers except friends and family, and explained the alleged charges mentioned in the letter were hugely inflated and invalid at law. I then contacted the Council for her and told them to drop their thoughtless actions forthwith, citing her existing agreement and the *National Standards for Enforcement Agents* (2002) curbing the use of bailiffs in cases of householder vulnerability. The letters stopped. And so did, I learned later, the footsteps. Six weeks later, she reported no more problems with either bailiffs or ghosts.

Looking over the sequence of events, it appears Mrs G had suffered an auditory hallucination, triggered by anxiety caused by the menacing letters. These pseudo-manifestations were thereafter quelled by effective re-assurance on her rights – a case of 'exorcism' by legal advice!

Later sharing this intriguing case with the Society for Psychical Research, I recommended adding the financial circumstances to a list of causes which might be relevant to ostensible reports of domestic hauntings, dubbing it 'The Case of the Ghostly Bailiff' (see *Journal of the SPR* (2010) vol.74, no.910)

By coincidence, the home of Mrs G stood just over three miles equidistant from Trent Park and Oak Hill Park in Barnet, areas reputedly long haunted by the notorious Geoffrey de Mandeville



GHOSTWATCH



ABOVE: One tradition says that de Mandeville haunts Saffron Walden Castle in Essex. LEFT: Another has it that his ghost walks in East Barnet, where a night watchman was said to have encountered it in 1926. The story was retold in a pre-Christmas issue of the *London Evening News* in 1957.

(1092-1144), custodian of the Tower of London, Sheriff of Essex and Hertfordshire and Middlesex and the most powerful and wicked bailiff of his era. Empowered to recover fines and taxes for the Crown for a share of the yield, Mandeville began blatantly abusing his powers, turning to wholesale extortion and plunder, looting chattels and livestock as he wished. Traces of a moated fort or castle that served as his base are still visible in Trent Park today, an earthwork known as Camlet Moat.

For his criminal extortion, de Mandeville was declared an outlaw. He retreated into the Fenlands and used the Isle of Ely and Ramsey Abbey as his headquarters. There he forged an alliance with another renegade sheriff sharing his taste for plunder – the rebellious Hugh Bigod of Bungay, Suffolk, onetime lord of half of East Anglia, a man strong enough to defy the King. However, pursued by forces loyal to King Stephen, in 1144 de Mandeville was tracked down and besieged at another castle, situated at Burwell in Cambridgeshire. Here he was slain as a consequence of an arrow wound. He was excommunicated before his death, and tradition holds that he haunts Saffron Walden Castle in Essex and parts of West Suffolk and the Barnet area. Folklore has it that his ally Hugh Bigod was punished by returning as a spectral black dog to Bungay Castle ruins. (See *Ghosts Over England* (1953) by R Thurston Hopkins).

An alternative Enfield tradition avers de Mandeville didn't die at Burwell but drowned in a well at Camlet Moat while

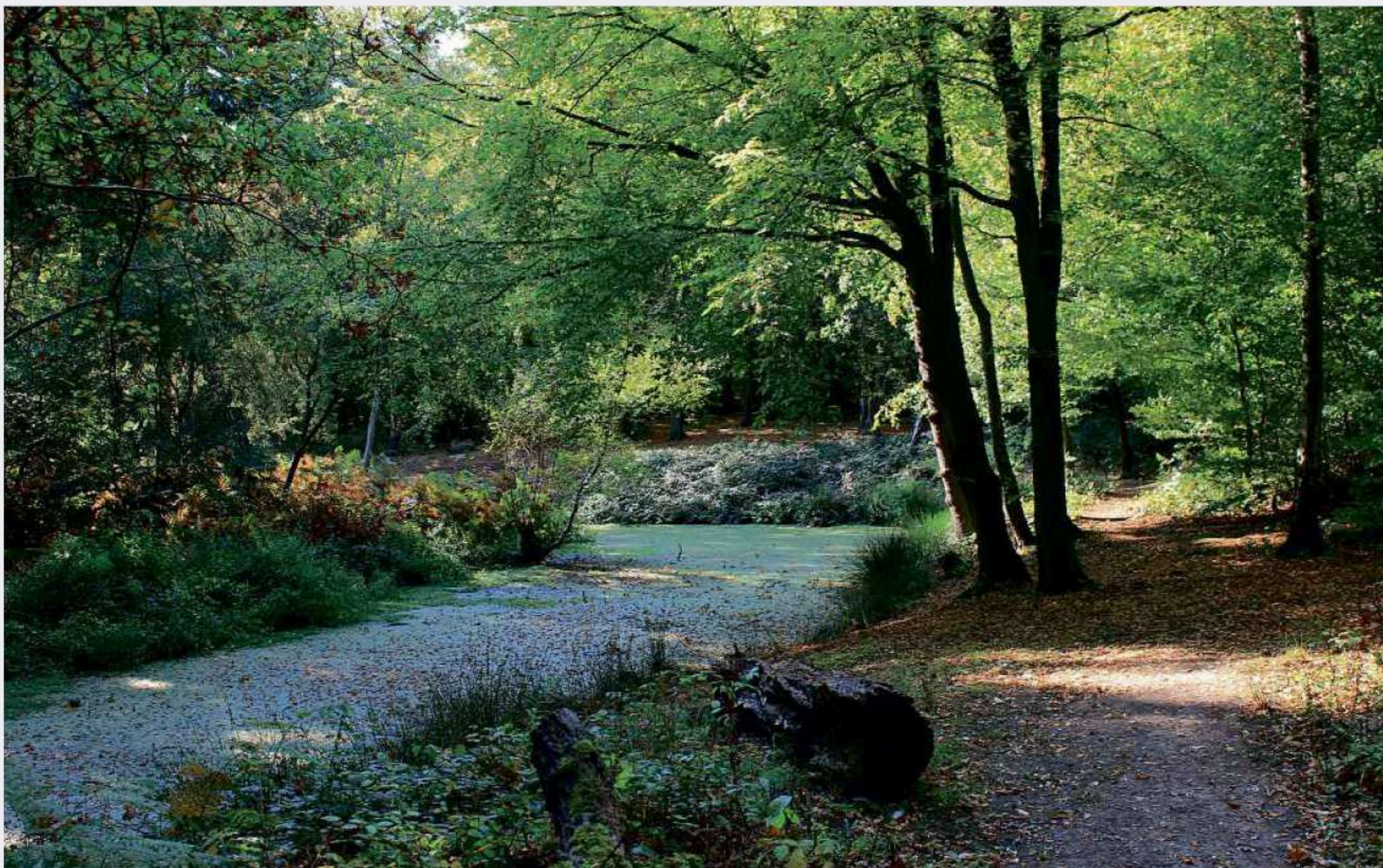
recovering his loot. In 1924, following an excavation, rumours spread across East Barnet that his ghost walked at Christmas time. In 1926 an East Barnet Council night watchman named John Gibson reported hearing footsteps and clanging sounds (taken to be armour) coming from the stable blocks of a property called the Grange. On 19 December 1926 he saw an apparition, "a tall figure in a long military cloak... I could see right through him; there was nothing but a skeleton." East Barnet Council put a shilling on his weekly wages.

The following year the Barnet Psychical Research Society publicly announced Mandeville would materialise on Christmas Eve. This resulted in a boisterous mob gathering, hoping to witness the apparition. Some claimed to hear strange underground rumblings, but no ghost appeared. Police were required to disperse the disappointed crowd. In 1928 a member of the London Spiritualist Society reported seeing a vague figure gliding towards East Barnet parish church before veering off in the direction of Trent Park to disappear inside a hedge, accompanied by a sound of clanking spurs. The Barnet Psychical Research Society tried again in December 1932, claiming they briefly observed a figure interpreted as a knight wearing a plumed helmet, accompanied by sounds like clinking spurs. (*Sunday Dispatch*, 24 Dec 1932). Optimistic watchers continued gathering over the next 15 years until at least 1946-47, with the *London Evening News* encouraging the belief the ghost appeared seasonally through to New Year. Thereafter

de Mandeville joined an ever-increasing host of spectres in the area, so many that by the mid-1990s the local paper, the *Barnet Press*, even set-up a ghost 'hotline' to receive reports. (For a detailed guide to the legendary history and the breathless psychic claims and fantasy attached, see Jennie Lee Cobban's entertaining *Geoffrey de Mandeville and London's Camelot: Ghosts, Historical Mysteries and the Occult in Barnet*, 2013).

I visited Camlet Moat on 10 August 2019, along with members of the Ghost Club. It survives as a modest-sized earth and water fortification, like a little islet. Studded with trees and holly bushes, it is tucked away to the north of Trent Park, reached by a narrow earthwork causeway. We found the site possessed a peaceful and auspicious atmosphere, and was a curiously silent place, with little sign of birds or insects at the heart of the Moat. This sense of remoteness is all the more mystifying given it lies no great distance from the Hadley Road, crossing Enfield Chase. This road has attracted stories of motorists encountering strange electrical light-forms and apparitions after dusk.

Beyond this, a few other connections between bailiffs and hauntings may be noted. Stories denouncing Tudor under-sheriff Sir John Baker (1488-1558) of Sissinghurst Castle in Kent as 'Bloody Baker' and 'England's Bluebeard' for the serial murder of successive brides are fabrications; his speciality was persecuting Protestants in the reign of Queen Mary. This has not stopped appearances of his



ABOVE: Camlet Moat, Enfield, is an alternate site for de Mandeville's ghost. **BELOW:** The Black Horse in Pluckley, Kent, was reputedly built by a wealthy bailiff.

ghost being claimed, accompanied by a phantom woman at Cranbrook, Kent.

The Bailiffs House pub in Bewdley High Street, Worcestershire, was rumoured to be haunted by strange noises nearly 20 years ago, but the presence was considered friendly and with a liking for children (*Sunday Mercury*, 20 Oct 2002). The allegedly haunted Black Horse Inn at Pluckley, Kent, was reputedly once a farmhouse built by a wealthy bailiff. Appropriately, objects were said to disappear unaccountably as if seized and removed by phantom hands, but along with the 15 other celebrated ghosts of Pluckley there may be less foundation to this than one might wish (see *Daily Mirror*, 8 May 2020).

Once in 1994 I also recall running into a gentleman who had previously been engaged in the overzealous pursuit of bankrupt debtors for a local authority until taking a futile and vindictive legal case as far as he could, all the way to the House of Lords (now the Supreme Court). The resultant heavy costs bill for his council masters far exceeded the debt concerned, prompted him to leave public service and turn to private bailiff work instead, though not noticeably dampening his enthusiasm for draconian enforcement.

Appropriately, objects were said to disappear as if seized and removed by phantom hands



On my enquiring about the philosophy of life which guided him, he identified himself as "a humanist" but also declared "I am a Spiritualist". He explained he was much given to attending séances in Yorkshire and the north of England, at which he attempted to contact the dead. I have to say, I felt this was rather taking debt collecting a little

too far, inevitably visualising mediumistic sessions in darkened rooms, knocking on tables instead of doors, pursuing lines of questioning such as "Is there anybody there – and have you paid?".

Finally, I must also record that I am not alone in sharing both a serious interest in enforcement law as well as in entity experiences and supernatural lore. As it happens, Britain's leading expert on bailiff law, John Kruse, author of such works as *Bailiff Powers: A Debtor's Guide* (1998) and *Taking Control of Goods* (2014), also writes extensively in the field of fairy traditions, running the interesting website *British Fairies* devoted to discussion and study of fairy folklore (<https://britishfairies.wordpress.com/>; see **FT406:36**).

Having dealt myself with many complaints of bailiff misbehaviour over the years, everything from claims of sexual assault to bailiffs tormenting farm animals, I can certainly vouch that a knowledge of the strange, the uncanny and the cryptozoological provides a most appropriate foundation for the issues that arise. It also prepares one for all the fairy stories of the other sort, which those in government and the enforcement industry are prone to telling...

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

John McAfee had long predicted that he would be “Epsteined”, says **NOEL ROONEY**, so does his untimely apparent suicide reveal the hand of the Deep State at work again?

DEAD PEOPLE'S TALES

The death of John McAfee – malware pioneer, maverick exponent of cryptocurrencies, outspoken blower of the Deep State whistle – caused a chain of eruptions in the conspiracist magma. McAfee had long hinted that elements of the Deep State were out to get him (in his own memorable phrasing of it, in 2019, they were sending him subtle messages that, decoded, read, “We’re going to kill yourself”) and his death, apparently by suicide, in a Catalan prison, has confirmed his suspicions for many in and outside the Conspirasphere.

In the period leading up to his death, McAfee posted a number of messages on various social media intimating that he might not have long to live and stressing that if he committed suicide, he didn’t. And his premonitions went back a long way; he had “\$WHACKD” tattooed on his arm in November of 2019, apparently a reference both to his fear of being assassinated, and to the meme cryptocurrency of that name he launched after the similarly contentious death of Jeffrey Epstein. His prophecy about being “Epsteined”, as some commentators are calling his death, was posted at the same time.

He also managed the singular feat of posting post-mortem on Instagram, and what he posted brought more theorists out of the woodwork. The post bore only a stark image of the letter ‘Q’, and most observers assumed immediately it was a reference to the now occulted author of the several thousand posts that gave rise to the QAnon community. He had occasionally tweeted hints that he knew the identity of Q, though he never got round to revealing it. The post was taken down a few hours after it



He managed the feat of posting post-mortem on Instagram

appeared, and to date no one has admitted posting it on his behalf.

Most of the media reports on his untimely death started from the assumption that he had killed himself after the Spanish authorities had granted an extradition request from the US on charges of tax evasion; but curiously, although the Spanish courts had indeed signalled their provisional agreement to the US request, the matter had not been finalised, and he was still in a position to appeal the decision. So why would he kill himself if he still had a chance to thwart his adversaries in court? That question is likely to exercise the C-sphere for some time.

During his colourful life, he had more than one brush with the law. In 2009, he moved to Belize, where, he claimed, he was investigating the medicinal properties of certain plants on the land he owned. In 2012, he came to the unwelcome attention of the authorities; the Belize police force’s Gang Suppression Unit raided his house, allegedly looking for weapons, and

found “blocks of something” that they claimed “resembled methamphetamine or cocaine”.

A few years later, in 2015, he was declared a “person of interest” in a Belize police investigation into the death of one Gregory Faull, a neighbour of his. News media suggested that there had been a dispute over McAfee’s dogs, and it had ended in a shooting. McAfee claimed that Faull was the victim of a professional hit gone wrong, and that he was the intended target. He fled to Guatemala, but was arrested for entering the country illegally and deported to the USA.

So by the time he ended up in jail in Barcelona, John McAfee had survived a number of encounters with law enforcement. His resilience in the face of these confrontations was legendary (if a legend of his own making) and again raises the question, with many observers, of why he would give up so suddenly now.

A whole bunch of other infamous names resurfaced with the story. Epstein, of course, but there was also a resurgence of interest in other dubious suicides – for instance, Vince Foster, former Arkansas attorney and one-time neighbour of Bill Clinton who became deputy White House counsel during the Clinton presidency, but apparently killed himself only a few months into his tenure, by shooting himself (twice, according to some accounts). Sceptical commentators saw a common thread in all of these cases; people who had crossed the Deep State and paid for it with their lives (one might say that being suicided is a meme cryptocurrency of the C-sphere).

Closer to home, the McAfee affair coincided with the re-emergence of a very British conspiracy. The UK government, after

eight years of prevaricating, finally published a report on its enquiry into the murder of Daniel Morgan in 1987. Morgan, a private detective, was found in the car park of a south London pub, an axe buried in his face and a large sum of cash in his pocket, though his pockets had been torn open and the notes he had taken during a meeting in the pub were missing. Despite six separate investigations, supergrass testimony and a series of botched court cases, no one has been convicted of the gruesome crime.

The web of corruption and intrigue around Morgan’s execution is spectacularly convoluted. It encompasses bent police officers, infamous villains (such as Kenneth Noye, the ‘road rage’ killer, and Clifford Norris, father of one of the suspects in the murder of Stephen Lawrence), the phone hacking scandal centred round the *News of the World* in the 1990s, paedophiles and government spin doctors. This is the kind of narrative that, when it’s presented as evidence by a conspiracy theorist, evokes derision from the mainstream.

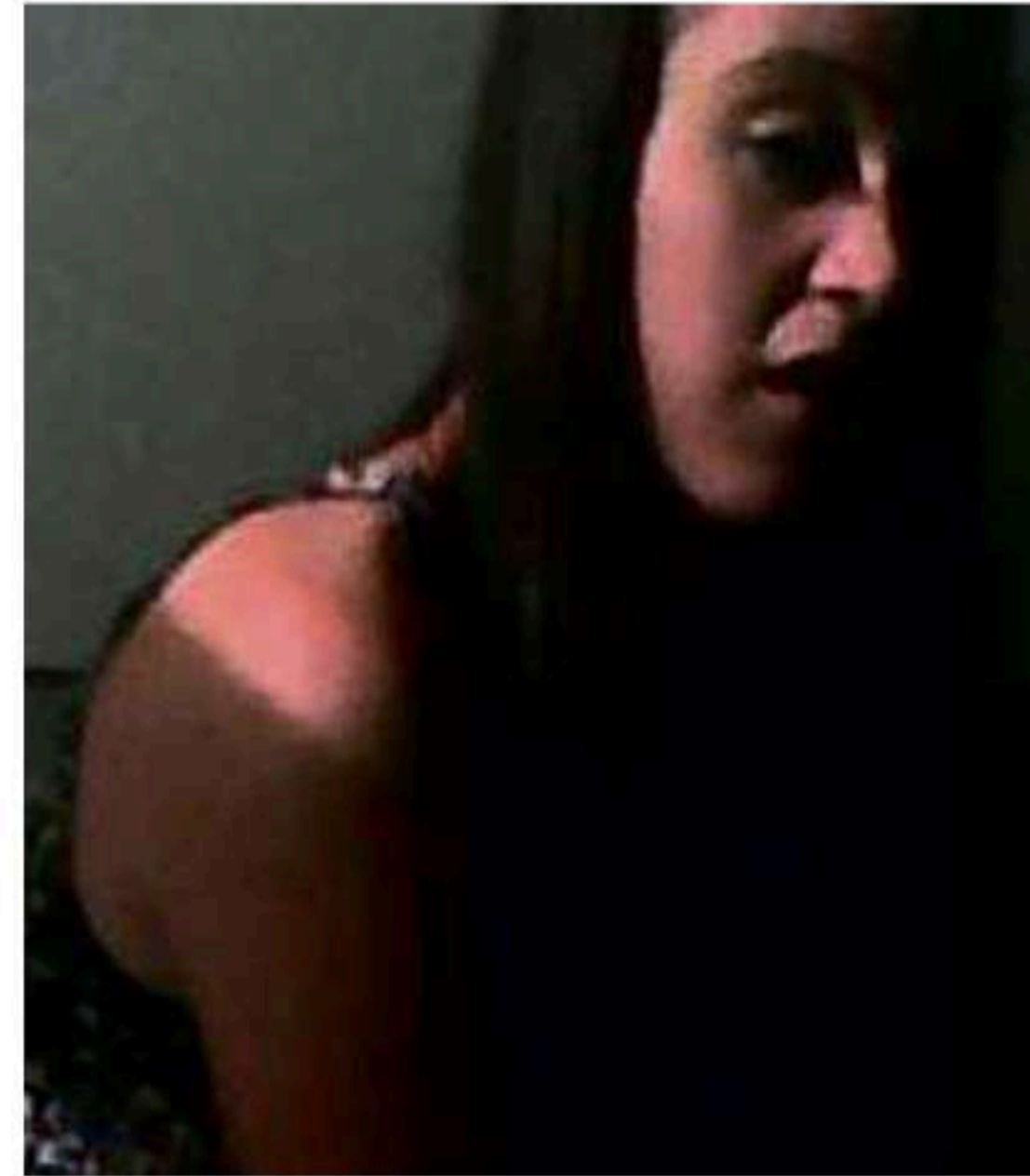
Dead people do tell tales; they can remind us that society floats on murky undercurrents; that claims about the Deep State, or collusion between criminal elements and the Establishment, are not always the province of the mad.

SOURCES

www.newsweek.com/john-mcafee-suicide-q-instagram-dead-mans-switch-1603638; <https://nationalfile.com/john-mcafee-repeatedly-warned-he-would-be-suicided-in-jail-a-la-epstein-called-out-deep-state-days-before-arrest/>; <https://cointelegraph.com/news/john-mcafee-launches-whackd-an-epstein-didnt-kill-himself-crypto>; <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/51941/Cover+up%21+How+the+state+helped+hide+the+truth+about+the+murder+of+Daniel+Morgan>



WHO'S THAT GIRL? | The Australian serial impostor whose many false identities have left a trail of chaos across three continents



ABOVE: The many identities of 32-year-old Samantha Azzopardi include: a teen sex trafficking victim, a Russian gymnast, a Pixar talent scout and an 18-year-old au pair.

In May, Samantha Azzopardi's international trail of confusion and chaos came to a temporary end when a Melbourne, Australia, court sentenced her to two years in prison for child stealing. Over a period of at least 10 years, Azzopardi, 32 – also known as Emily Peet, Lindsay Coughlin, Dakota Johnson, Georgia McAuliffe, Harper Hernandez, Harper Hart and a host of other names – was a serial impostor, spinning yarns and creating false identities across Australia, Canada and Ireland, to the intense annoyance and frustration of the authorities. She had convinced a US backpacker she was a Swedish Royal named Annika Dekker who had been kidnapped when she was a young girl, forcing her to hide out with her in a cabin for eight days; led a Perth family to believe she was a Russian gymnast who was the sole survivor of a murder-suicide incident in France; and persuaded social services in Sydney that she was a teen sex trafficking victim, managing to get placed in a foster home and enrolled in school while she was actually in her mid-20s.

Azzopardi often posed as a teen, even into her 30s, getting away with it due to her slight figure, soft voice and tendency to nervously chew her fingers. In Ireland in 2013 she created quite a stir, making headlines as “the GPO Girl”, having been

found by the police outside Dublin's General Post Office looking distressed but refusing to speak. Two officers took her to hospital, where she remained for several weeks, not eating and refusing to say a word, although she indicated that she was 14 years old using hand signals. Police dedicated considerable resources to trying to identify her; as she had newly fitted tooth braces, they even contacted orthodontists nationwide. Eventually, a family she had stayed with on arriving in Ireland recognised her photo, resulting in her being flown back to Australia, escorted by police, still without ever speaking. Detective Superintendent Gallagher who led the investigation said: “There were calls from some to move to a criminal investigation for making a false report, while others felt that she in fact never made any statement or false report as she had never spoken.”

The following year, she was in Calgary, Canada, as Aurora Hepburn, a 14-year-old victim of abuse who had escaped her kidnapper; once again authorities believed her and made considerable efforts to investigate her case before someone discovered the Dublin story and made the connection, resulting in a conviction on a mischief charge and another escorted flight back to Australia.

Back in Australia in late

2016, Azzopardi enrolled at the Good Shepherd School at Marrickville in New South Wales, claiming to be a 13-year-old named Harper Hart, but in June 2017 she was charged with “dishonestly obtaining financial advantage by deception, for the education, counselling, food, accommodation and electronics she was given while posing as Harper” and was sentenced to a year in prison. On release, she initially kept a low profile, getting a job for a year as an au pair for professional basketball player Tom Jervis and his wife Jezze, a life coach. She lost the post after she was caught using Mrs Jervis's identity to befriend a 12-year-old girl, pretending to be a casting agent who could get her a job as a voiceover artist in a Pixar movie and persuading her to carry out a series of bizarre tasks to qualify.

The escapade that led to Azzopardi's most recent imprisonment came about after she posed as an 18-year-old au pair named Sakah and got a job with a French couple in Geelong. They asked her to take their children, aged four and 10 months, for a picnic, but instead of doing so locally, she took them to Bendigo, 200km (120 miles) away, triggering a police hunt. While there, she even diverted, with the children in tow, to a local counselling service where she presented herself as a pregnant

teenager, dressing in a school uniform and arranging for an unknown individual to call the service in advance pretending to be her father. Shortly after, police apprehended her in a department store, finding ID documents on her belonging to 19 different people, including a child.

In court, Azzopardi pleaded guilty to the child stealing charge, although her defence said her client had not planned to keep the two children from their parents or to harm them. After carrying out an assessment, forensic psychiatrist Dr Jacqueline Rakov diagnosed Azzopardi as suffering from a rare personality disorder, pseudologia fantastica, manifesting as compulsive lying and internally motivated by her fantasies of recreating a happy childhood narrative. The court acknowledged concerns over Azzopardi's mental health and severe trauma and abuse she had been subjected to in her past. They did, however, feel there was a high chance of her reoffending. Superintendent Gallagher, who had followed Azzopardi's subsequent escapades after the Dublin incident, said: “The problem is whether prison is a suitable place for her... In Ireland, she wasn't a danger to herself or others, albeit she was a considerable nuisance.” *BBC News; news.com.au, 30 May 2021.*

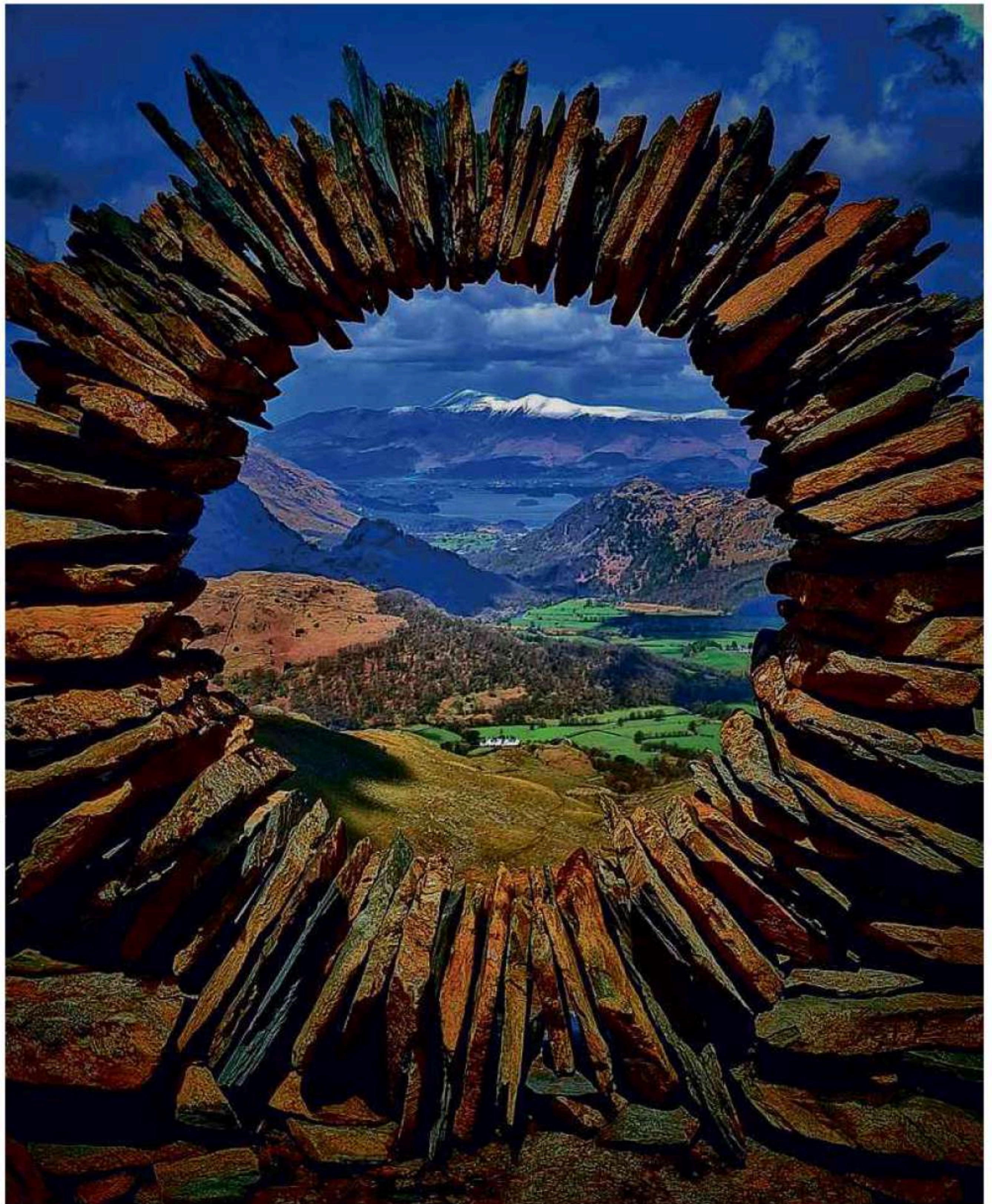


ART OF THE UNUSUAL

Pop-up land art in the Lakes, political Pac-Man in the Czech Republic and a Loch Ness Monster down under

BORROWDALE BANKSY

In a very British response to the international mystery monolith phenomenon that began with the discovery of a steel monolith in the Utah desert last November (FT401:4; 402:24, 406:26) a mystery sculptor has been erecting pieces of land art in secluded locations in Borrowdale in the English Lake District. Dubbed “Borrowdale Banksy” by locals on account of their anonymity, the mysterious artist has created works reminiscent of the sculptor Andy Goldsworthy out of local slate in Dalehead, Raven Crag and Castle Crag. The Borrowdale Institute, the local village hall, described the artist as a “very talented [and] patient individual”. Local photographer and mountaineer Carl Halliday, 50, said of the circular structure he had seen that he was impressed with the way it blended with its surroundings “despite being a new and manmade piece of art” and that it seemed sensitive to the existing environment and complemented the already stunning views. The actual locations of the structures are being kept vague by locals as all of them are in places that are only accessible to experienced climbers, and they do not want to encourage casual sightseers to try and reach them; however, a spokesman for the Borrowdale Institute said, “Whoever you/they are, please carry on, we want more.” *BBC News*, 19 May; *Guardian*, 20 May; *news.sky.com*, 20 May 2021.



CZECH CROP CIRCLE

On 22 May a giant crop circle in the shape of Pac-Man appeared near the town of Roudnice nad Labem in the Czech Republic on the 41st anniversary of the video game’s launch. Taking up most of an 18-hectare (44.5 acre) oilseed rape field, where it was created by cutting the crop rather than by the more traditional

method of flattening it in situ, it was one of the largest crop formations ever made. The glyph carried a further meaning: 22 May is also World Biodiversity Day, and the field belongs to the Agrofert Group, a corporation with close links to the Czech prime minister Andrej Babiš. Czech guerrilla art group Ztohoven issued a statement claiming responsibility for the circle (see www.ztohoven.cz/exit-the-game/index.html) saying it was a protest against both the prime minister and monolithic agribusiness



TOP: A sculpture created by the mysterious ‘Borrowdale Banksy’. ABOVE: Czech activist artists Ztohoven at work among the crops.

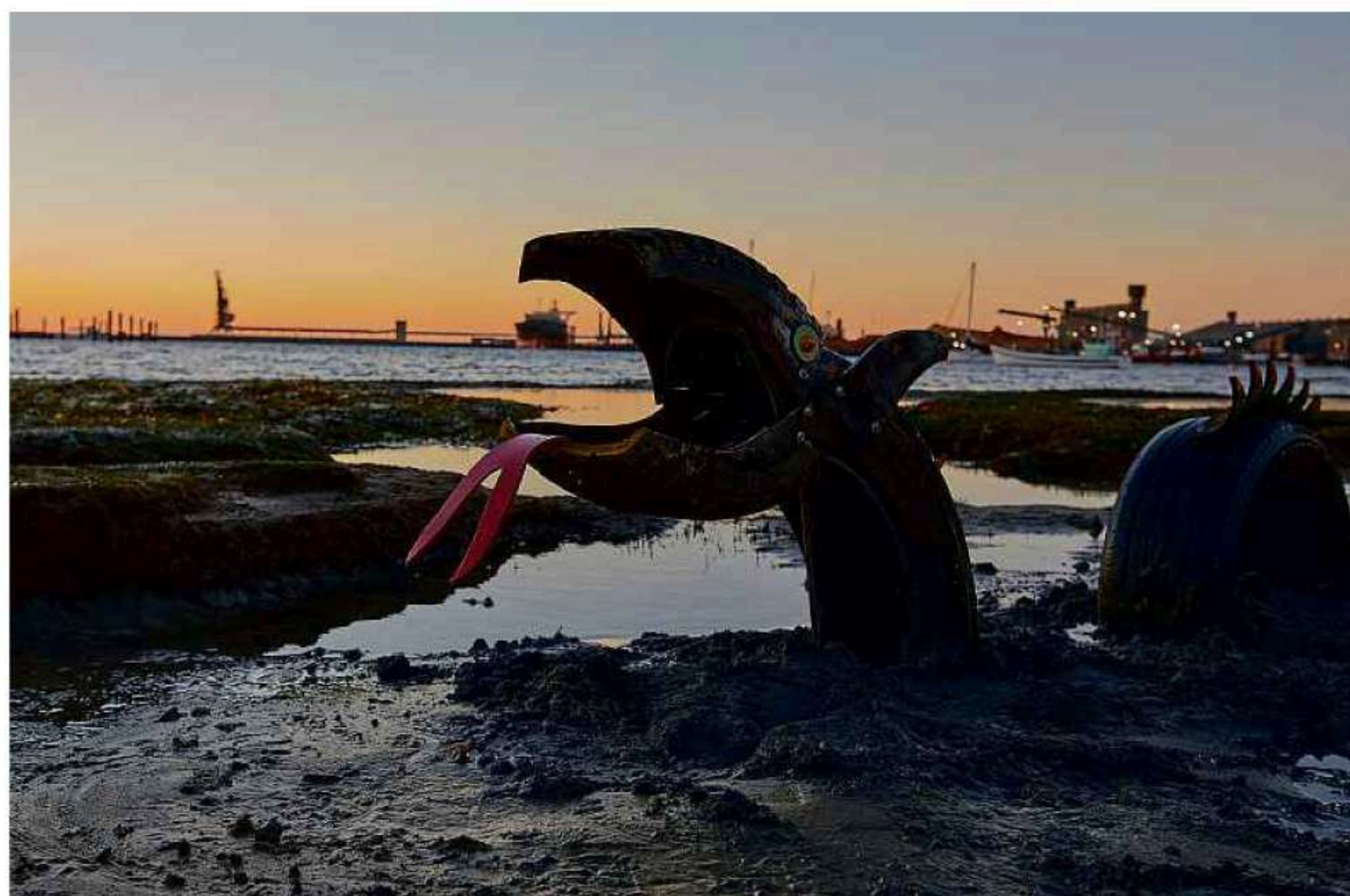


corporations. It states: “Pac-Man destroys our natural ecosystem and leaves monocultural toxic waste behind. Pac-Man ruins culture, individual freedoms and entrepreneurial diversity. Pac-Man hacks democracy and keeps abusing it. Pac-Man destroys competition by unfair taxation. Pac-Man reintroduces and fuels corruption. Pac-Man denies critical thinking and science. Pac-Man cannot control individuals who refuse to enter the enclosed game field.” The statement ends with the words “Exit the game”.

Ztohoven are well known in the Czech Republic for actions that blend art and politics. Their highest-profile intervention was flying oversize red underwear in place of the presidential flag at Prague Castle in 2015. Members all use pseudonyms, often ones that work as puns in both Czech and English, including “Roman Tyc” and “Dan Gerous”. “Ztohoven” itself is a Czech-language pun and can be read either as *Z toho ven* (“The way out”), or *Sto Hoven* (“One hundred shits”). The group translates its name into English as “Out of shit”. *Expats.cz*, 25 May; *BoingBoing.net*, 26 May 2021.

NESSIE DOWN UNDER

Meanwhile, in Portland, Australia, another mystery artist has paid homage to a classic forteen phenomenon during the country’s most recent lockdown, constructing a Loch Ness Monster out of car tyres on the town’s beach. It has been positioned so that it is underwater most of the time and only fully appears at low tides. Retired local art teacher Robyn McDonald said: “It’s so well-positioned and those tidal elements bring more intrigue as it disappears for most of the day.” The local council issued a statement about the artwork, saying “We thought international borders were closed, but it seems we have an escapee from Scotland in our town; fortunately the Covid test came back negative”. *Abc.net.au/news*, 4 June 2021.



TOP: A giant Pac-Man in the Czech Republic. ABOVE: Two views of Portland’s mystery sculpture – a Nessie made of tyres.

ZTOHOVEN

BOTH PHOTOS: SUNARAZZI / WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SUNARAZZI



KARL SHUKER on forgotten fish, a very rare tiger and a monster museum in the making...



ABOVE LEFT: John Burroughs (l), Kendall Hart (r) and friend. ABOVE RIGHT: One of IFS officer Parveen Kaswan's photographs of 'Goldie' the golden tabby tiger. FACING PAGE: Some of Kendall Hart's creations, destined for the World Myth Museum – Bigfoot (main image), a troll (top right) and a Kappa (bottom right).

MONSTER MUSEUM

For some years now, artist/sculptor Kendall Hart has been travelling across North America with a show entitled Gardens of Myth, which consists of several incredibly detailed, larger-than-life-sized sculptures of various legendary monsters and fantastic beasts of folklore from all around the world. These include the Arkansas gowrow (a gigantic lizard), bigfoot, Scandinavian troll, Oriental dragon, and Japanese kappa (a shell-bearing, amphibious humanoid entity). However, since meeting John Burroughs, former director of the Rogers Historical Museum in Arkansas, Hart now has his eyes set on something even greater. As recently announced in the media, he and Burroughs have combined their efforts in the hope of establishing a permanent, stationary exhibition in northwest Arkansas to house Hart's breathtaking creations, whose planned name is the World Myth Museum, and which will be unlike any other museum ever conceived. To quote Burroughs:

"This will be the only museum of its kind in the world to offer a comprehensive exploration of myths and legends. We want to inspire people to understand how culture has defined legends and the process of myth-making and storytelling. We want to inspire people to be curious, and we want to have conversations with our visitors about legends they may have experienced. And we want to inspire people to appreciate all of the stories that attempt to explain the world around us. The strength of our exhibits will be in the life-like sculptures that will bring our visitors face to face with legends." And judging from photographs of those exceedingly impressive sculptures, the World Myth Museum will guarantee

its visitors a truly astonishing, unique spectacle that will live in their memory for a long time to come. We at *FT* await further developments with great interest, and very much look forward to the day when everyone can visit this veritable museum of monsters, to gaze in awe and wonder at its amazing legends come (almost) to life! www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/may/30/the-myth-ing-link/.

SEEKING LOST FISHES

In collaboration with Re:wild and the IUCN-SSC Freshwater Fish Specialist Group, the fish-themed partnership Shoal has compiled a list of over 300 species of freshwater fish that are currently missing, and which will now be the targets of specific expeditions sent out to their often obscure or remote last-recorded locations in the hope that at least some of these AWOL, seemingly lost to science species will be successfully rediscovered and subsequently conserved. At present, the full list has been narrowed down to create a top 10 most wanted species. All of them are strange with very unusual histories. They include Colombia's aptly named fat catfish, distinguished from all other fishes by its extraordinary rings of fatty tissue that encircle its entire body like a series of onion rings, so that it resembles a piscine Michelin Man; the Haditha cavefish of Iraq, a blind species recorded from only a single underground sinkhole located directly beneath a holy shrine near Haditha; and the Syr Darya shovelnose sturgeon, formerly known from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, which not only is one of the world's smallest sturgeon species but also is characterised by an astonishing whip-like tail filament that is almost as long as its total head and body

combined. Funding is now being sought to assist in financing searches for these and the other seven species on Shoal's Top Ten list. <https://shoalconservation.org/search-for-lost-fishes/>.

TIGER, TIGER, GOLDEN BRIGHT

Down through the ages, several very unusual freak colour or pattern varieties of tiger have been reported in the wild state, including white tigers, black tigers, pseudo-melanistic tigers, red tigers, even blue tigers, and tigers without stripes. Moreover, a particularly distinctive variety has occasionally appeared among captive tigers, known variously as the golden tiger, golden tabby tiger, or ginger tiger, on account of its extremely distinctive gingery-gold coat colour, marked only with exceedingly thin, pale stripes and complemented by very conspicuous snowy-white underparts. The precise genetic basis of this very rare colour morph has yet to be determined, although a recessive mutant gene allele is suspected, and which would now seem to have arisen in the wild state as well. For the very first verified example of a golden tiger known to exist in the wild has lately been not only sighted but also photographed, in Assam's Kaziranga National Park, India. It was encountered and snapped there by Mayuresh Hendre, with his superb full-colour photos of this beautiful, exceedingly rare animal, dubbed Goldie, subsequently shared by Indian Forest Services (IFS) officer Parveen Kaswan. Although originally reported in July 2020, this remarkable creature's existence and history have only recently come to widespread attention online. www.deccanherald.com/national/india-s-only-golden-tiger-spotted-in-assams-kaziranga-national-park-860334.html 12 July 2020.





GOING, GOING, GONE

Curiosities under the hammer: Churchill's cigar butt, Hitler's lavatory seat, Gandhi's glasses and more...

- A pair of glasses once owned by Mahatma Gandhi sold for £260,000 at auction in Bristol on 21 August 2020, 26 times their guide price. They were given to the current owner's uncle in the 1920s and sold to a US collector. A shawl worn by Gandhi sold in 2013 for £40,000. *D.Mirror*, 22 Aug 2020.

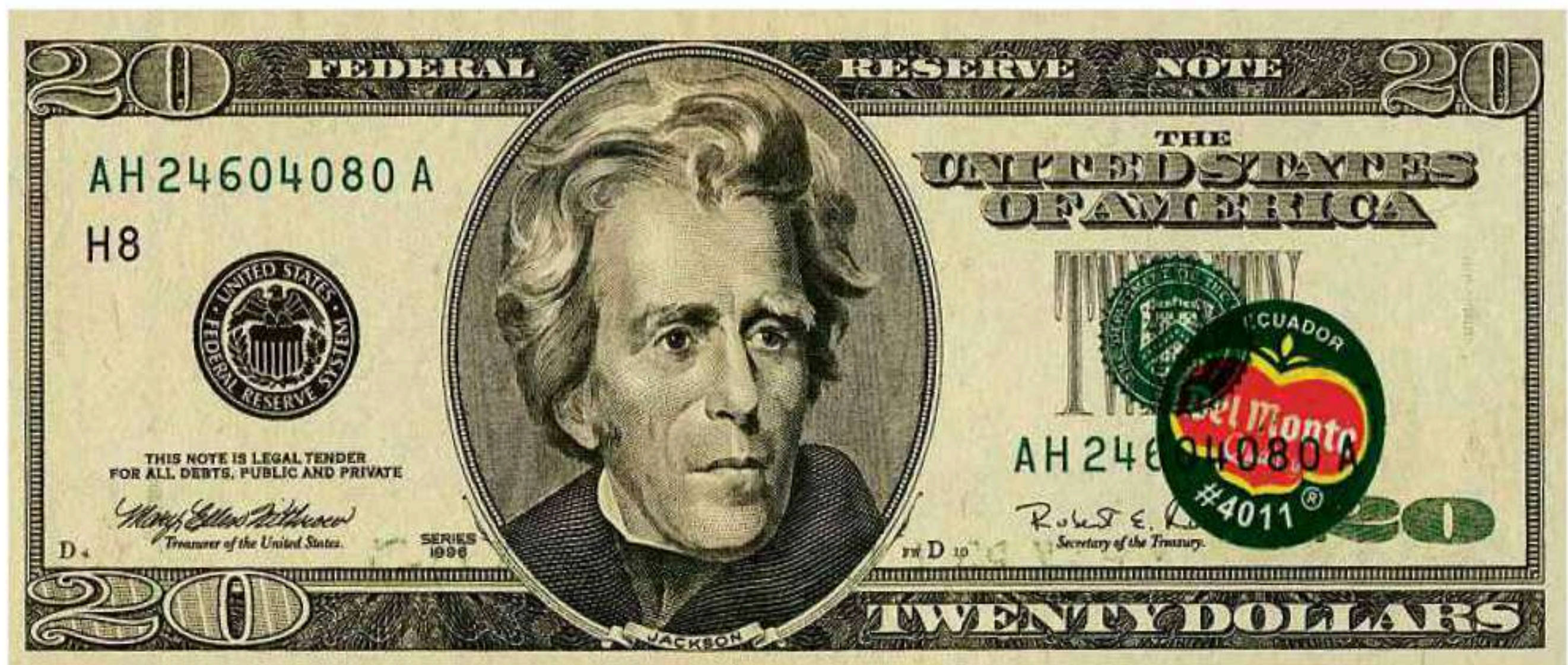
- The 5in (13cm) steel key to Napoleon's prison bedroom in Longwood House, St Helena, was auctioned online by Sotheby's in January for £81,900. The emperor was held prisoner on the South Atlantic island, where he died in 1821. The key was taken on 6 September 1822 by Charles Richard Fox, who later became a general. He gave it to his mother, Baroness Holland, a "super fan" of Napoleon, who already had a collection of items connected to the emperor, including one of his socks. Her descendants, living near Edinburgh, found the key in an old trunk. *D.Telegraph*, 11 Jan; *BBC News*, 14 Jan 2021.

- A leather jug made from Blackjack, Oliver Cromwell's war horse, was sold by Duke's auctioneers of Dorchester, Dorset, in March for £9,620 after a bidding war. The 2ft (60cm) high tankard was made for the Lord Protector from his horse's hide and used to carry water or ale. It bears a silver armorial mount (possibly added later) with the Cromwell coat of arms, the date 1653 and the motto 'Pax Quæritur Bello' (Peace is sought by war), which is found on his coinage. The jug has been passed down in the Hoare banking family. *Metro*, 1 Mar 2021.

- A half-smoked cigar discarded by Winston Churchill went under the hammer at Bellman's auction house in Wisborough Green, West Sussex, in May, where it was expected to fetch around £800; in the end, it sold



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A leather jug made from Oliver Cromwell's horse; the key to Napoleon's St Helena prison bedroom; A \$20 bill with a DelMonte banana sticker; a half-smoked cigar discarded by Winston Churchill in the 1940s; a pair of spectacles once owned by Mahatma Gandhi.



DUKE'S AUCTIONEERS

EAST BRISTOL AUCTIONS

SOTHEBY'S

HERITAGE AUCTIONS

BELLMAN'S AUCTIONS

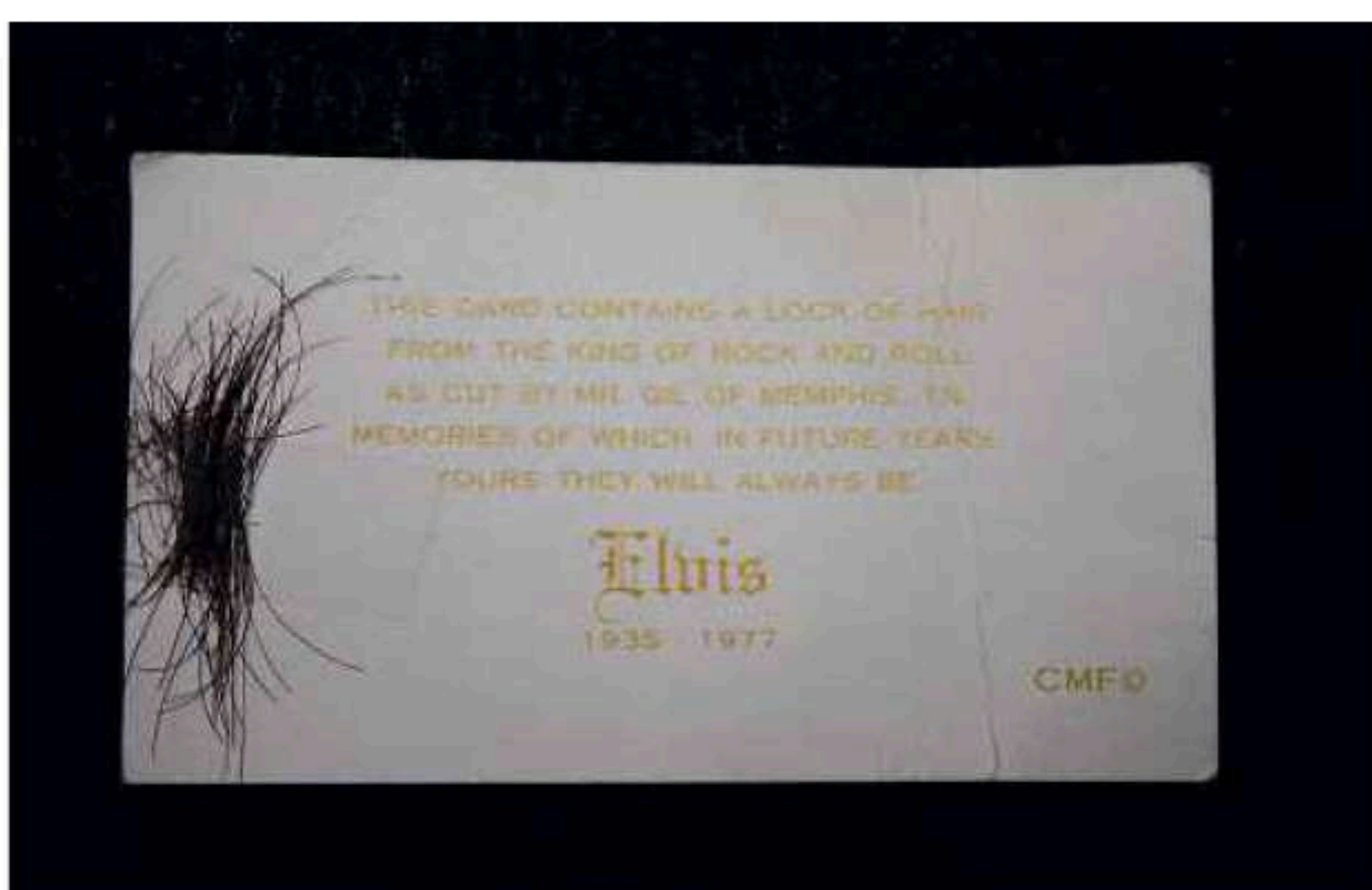
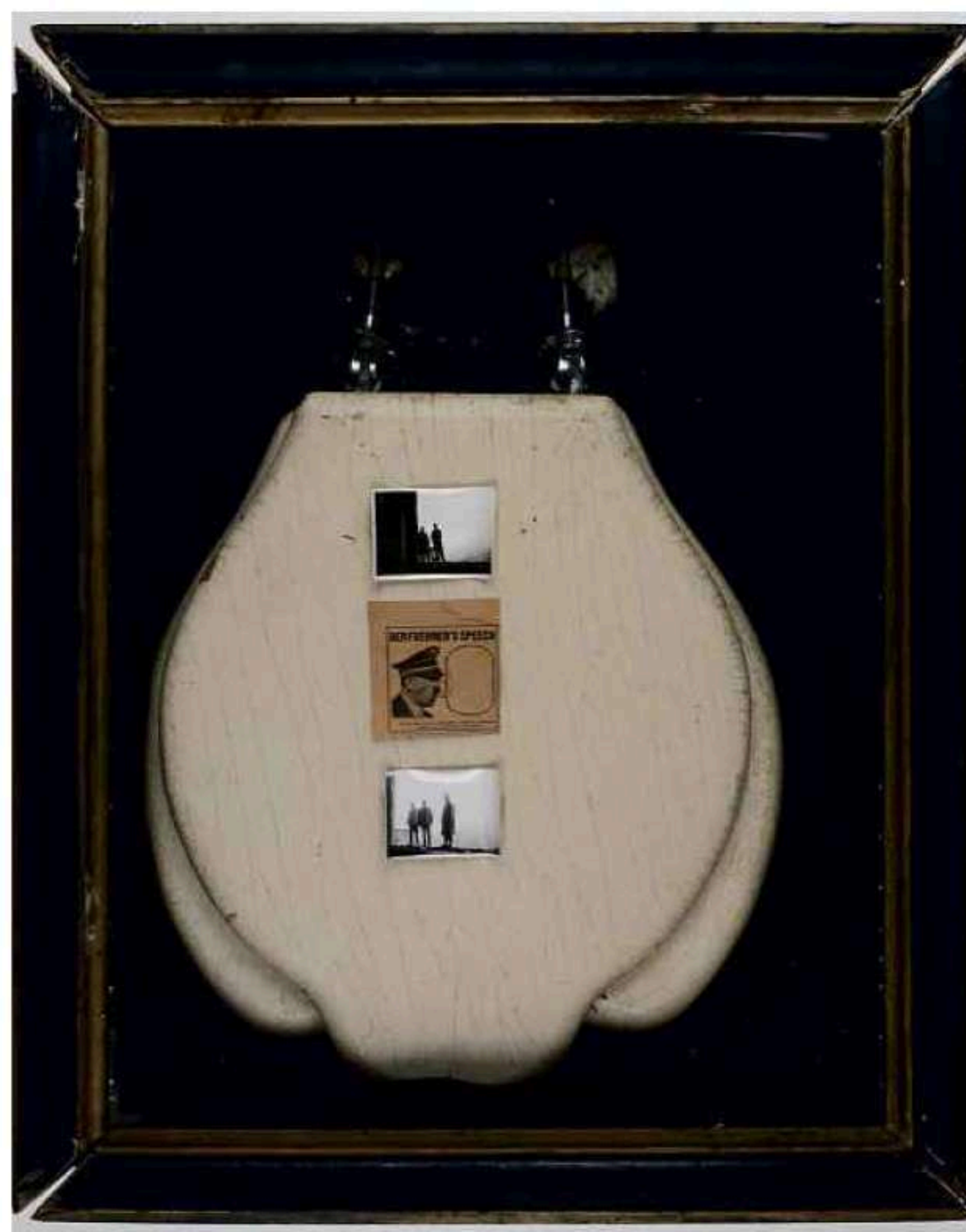


for £3,500 (£4,270 including a buyer's premium). The cigar butt had been tossed aside by Britain's wartime prime minister in the 1940s, when it was picked up by Arthur Church, a policeman who was escorting Churchill at the time. The cigar had remained in Mr Church's family until its sale. Another of Churchill's half-smoked cigars, this one discarded in 1947, fetched £9,000 at auction in Boston in 2017. *BBC News*, 26 May; *Mid Sussex Times*, 28 May 2021.

- Hitler's white wooden lavatory seat with lid – from his bathroom at the Berghof, his retreat in the Bavarian Alps – sold for \$18,750 (£13,750) on 9 February to an anonymous buyer. It was seized by Ragnvald C Borch, one of the first GIs on the scene in May 1945. When asked by another soldier why he was carrying a lavatory seat, Sergeant Borch replied: "Where do you think Hitler put his ass?" His son put the Nazi relic up for sale at Alexander Historical Auctions in Maryland. Also in the "spoils of war" sale were Eva Braun's lace knickers and pink nightgown, which fetched £1,300 each. A pair of her stockings went for £350. *D.Mail*, 1 Feb; *Sun*, 10 Feb 2021.

- One-off anomalies can sometimes fetch eye-watering sums. A \$20 bill with a Del Monte banana sticker beside the portrait of former President Andrew Jackson sold for £289,439 in January after a bidding war between four buyers. The note was dispensed by a cash machine in 2004 to a student who flogged it on eBay for about £8,000. How the sticker got there remains a mystery. "There no telling if it was affixed to test printing standards or just a prank by a worker," said Dallas-based Heritage auctions. *Metro*, 25 Jan 2021.

- Dentures belonging to Michael Jackson's father Joe came up for auction in Las Vegas on 29 September 2020,



with bidding starting at £200. Joe Jackson died in 2018, aged 89. Various websites seem curiously coy about telling us how much the dentures actually fetched. *Sunday People*, 27 Sept 2020.

- A strand of Elvis Presley's quiff sold at auction for £4,000 in November. The hair was collected by Memphis barber Homer Gilleland, who even cut the King's hair on tour and on film sets. After Elvis died, Gilleland would give a few strands to fans taped to

a card; when he retired, he began to sell the hair. This particular lock belonged to Tom Unwin, 75, from Kidsgrove, Staffordshire, who bought it 10 years ago. *BBC News*, 19 Nov 2020.

- A "teapot" discovered in a Derbyshire garage during lockdown and almost sent to a charity shop, sold at auction for £468,000 to an anonymous Chinese bidder on 24 September 2020. The 6in (15cm) yellow enamelled vessel, decorated with peonies,

TOP LEFT: A white wooden lavatory seat from Hitler's Berghof, seized by a GI in 1945. **BELOW LEFT:** A lock of Elvis Presley's hair, saved by a Memphis barber.

turned out to be a Chinese wine ewer from the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1735-1796). Only three others are known – two in Beijing and one in Taiwan. *D.Mail*, *Sun*, 10 +25 Sept 2020.

- A bottle of whisky dubbed "the holy grail of single malts" sold at an online auction in February for £1 million. The Macallan was one of only 14 of its kind from the Moray distillery's legendary cask number 263, the world's most celebrated whisky cask. The Spanish oak sherry hogshead was filled in 1926, and the drink was allowed to mature for 60 years before it was bottled in 1986. The world record for a bottle of whisky at auction stands at £1.2 million (nearly £1.5 million with premiums) for a bottle from the same batch, sold at Sotheby's in October 2019. *D.Mail*, 24 Feb 2021.

- A racing pigeon sold for a record-breaking \$1.44 million in an online auction on 15 November after a bidding war between two Chinese rivals calling themselves Super Duper and Hitman. Super Duper won. Two-year-old female New Kim was reared by world-renowned Belgian breeder Gaston van der Wouwer. The previous world record was set in 2019 when a Chinese construction tycoon bought Armando, also bred by the now retired Mr van der Wouwer, for £1.1 million. *D.Mail*, 16 Nov 2020.

- An extremely rare purple-pink diamond described as "a true wonder of nature" sold for almost £20 million last November at Sotheby's in Geneva. The Spirit of the Rose (named after a ballet starring Vaslav Nijinsky) was mined in Russia in 2017. *[R]* *Metro*, 13 Nov 2020.

NECROLOG

We say goodbye to the Norfolk pensioner who fought off Satanists and uncovered a wealth of mediæval art, and the murderer who put Amityville on the map.



BOB DAVEY

Norfolk pensioner and amateur church restorer Bob Davey died on 4 March 2021, aged 91. He spent most of his life working as an agricultural engineer, and later a Southern Water superintendent, before moving to North Pickenham at the age of 58 to start an antiques business based in Swaffham. Five years later, in the abandoned village of Houghton-on-the-Hill, his wife Gloria discovered a derelict mediæval church, St Mary's, which dates back to around AD 1000. It had suffered damage in World War I when a returning Zeppelin dumped its bombs on the churchyard, and was abandoned in 1933, though never deconsecrated. During WWII, American GIs ripped out a Gothic window as a souvenir, thus causing the roof to fall in, with what remained of the building being overrun by thick brambles and ivy. Inside, Gloria found St Mary's had been taken over by Satanists. There was a Pagan altar, and symbols of the Antichrist had been daubed in blood across the walls. An 18th century rector's grave had been desecrated and his bones taken.

Gloria and Bob were devout Christians and he resolved to expunge every trace of Satanic

activity. He started by clearing the churchyard and arranged a purification service. For almost two years he camped out in the ruined church. "They kept coming back," he recalled. "There were more of them than I expected. They would all be wearing black, and were of all ages." On one occasion a young man, "very tall, thin and pale and dressed all in black", called at their home, threatening Bob with death if he maintained his vigil. Eventually the local Territorial Army offered their services, deterring the Satanists.

But that was just the beginning. For the next 25 years, without taking holidays, Bob gradually restored the church, clearing the brambles, planting thousands of daffodils, and repairing the rector's desecrated tomb and the damaged tower. He found the church bell in another church, the font being used as a flowerpot by a local vicar, and the stoup repurposed by a local woman who was employing it as a birdbath. He also managed to locate the church's silver chalice, dating from 1550, and its 1709 Bible. As the church had no access road, he began building his own. "It's seven-eighths of a mile," he told an interviewer in 2014. "I

built it out of crushed concrete. It took me three months."

Inside, some remarkable discoveries were made once the Victorian plasterwork, cracked by the Zeppelin bomb, had been removed. The walls bore biblical texts from the Elizabethan era, paintings from the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, and what are now believed to be the oldest Romanesque wall paintings in Britain, dating back to 1090 or even to Anglo-Saxon times. The images included a huge depiction of the Holy Trinity, saints and martyrs, demons holding scrolls, parts of a Last Judgement, with figures tumbling into Hell and angels summoning the dead from their tombs, and a depiction of God creating Eve. Over the years more and more images emerged, including a Noah's Ark and a Wheel of Fortune. The paintings are now regarded as being the earliest surviving extensive scheme of mediæval wall painting in Britain.

When he first began the restoration project, the only guidebook Bob could find mentioning St Mary's described it as a "rather boring little church". But in 1999, the revised Pevsner guide to North-West Norfolk described the paintings as being "of extraordinary importance". "Life throws up these opportunities and you either take them on or walk away," Bob once said. "You have got to do something when you retire. You can't just sit about or play golf."

Bob Davey, engineer, antiques dealer and church guardian, born West Sussex, 25 April 1929; died North Pickenham, Norfolk, 4 March 2021, aged 91.

RONALD DEFEO JR.

The Amityville Horror, based on the alleged paranormal experiences of the Lutz family after they moved into 112 Ocean Avenue, Amityville, in Long Island, New York (see FT190:32-37, 325:44-46, 397:56-57) has

become one of the longest-running and most profitable horror franchises. It has spawned numerous books and over 20 films of wildly varying quality (the low point probably being the horror "comedy" *The Amityville Vibrator*) and endless debate as to whether the story represents a frightening encounter with evil, a fabricated cash cow or something in between.

Without Ronald DeFeo Jr., who has died in prison aged 69, though, there would have been no *Amityville Horror*. 112 Ocean Drive, a large Dutch Colonial house, was purchased by the Lutz family at a bargain price in late 1975 after it had lain empty for over a year, the reason for its vacancy and low price being that DeFeo had murdered his entire family in the property on the night of 12 November 1974. It is not entirely clear what happened; Ronald was the only survivor, and he gave a number of conflicting accounts over the years, but by the morning his parents, Ronald and Louise, his brothers, Mark and John Matthew, and his sisters, Dawn and Allison, had all been shot dead with a .35-calibre Marlin rifle. It is this act of carnage that is supposed to have created the conditions for the flamboyant haunting, which included strange smells, bitter cold and poltergeists that drove the Lutz family from the house after a mere three months' residence.

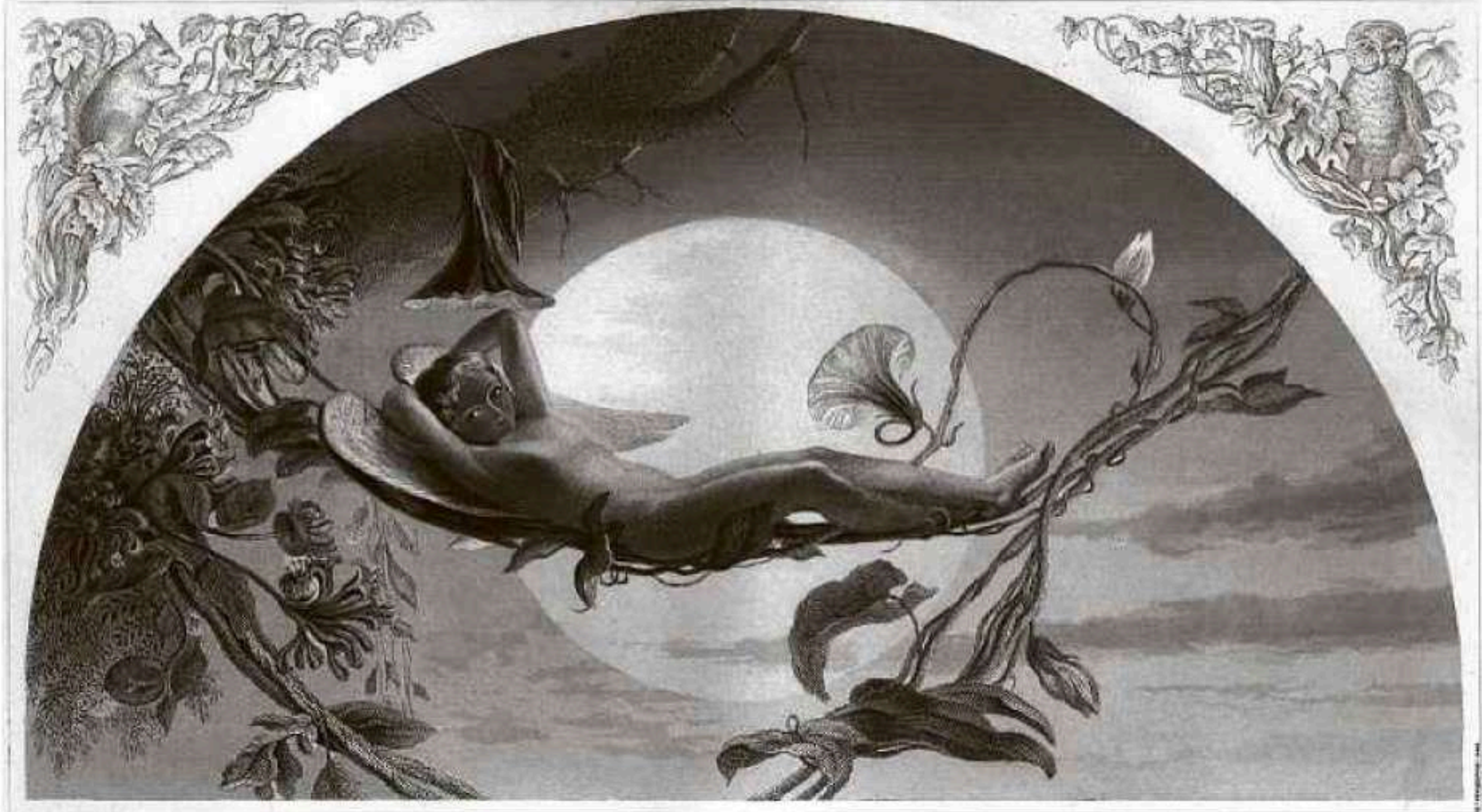
On the morning after the murders, 23-year-old DeFeo went to work at the family car dealership and feigned ignorance of his family's fate, but at 6.30 that evening, he went to Henry's Bar near Ocean Avenue and cried: "You got to help me! I think my mother and father are shot!" DeFeo and a small group of people went to the house and found his parents dead inside. One of the group, Joe Yeswit, made an emergency call to the police, who searched the house and found all six



members of the family dead in their beds. Questioned by the police, DeFeo gave them a yarn about the family being threatened and suggested that a mafia hit man, Louis Falini, might have been responsible. DeFeo was placed in protective custody while police sought the murderer, but it wasn't long before his tale began to unravel – the fact that his family were all still in their nightwear pointed to the probability that the murders had happened the previous night while DeFeo was still at home; then the police found the box in which the murder weapon had been purchased in his room. Confronted with this evidence, he broke down and confessed to killing his family, then hiding the gun and bloodstained clothes in a drain on his way to work saying: "Once I started, I just couldn't stop. It went so fast."

After leaving school at 16 with no qualifications, DeFeo had drifted through various dead-end jobs while developing a serious drug habit, but eventually his father took him on as a mechanic in the family business. It seems, however, that he bore a grudge against DeFeo Sr. for keeping him in a low-paid job and had been stealing from the company. His father began to suspect him, and Ronald threatened to kill him, making good on his threat shortly afterwards. At his trial, DeFeo attempted an insanity defence, claiming he heard voices and had a dissociative disorder, but the prosecution successfully demonstrated he had antisocial personality disorder and was aware of his actions. As a result, he was convicted on half-a-dozen counts of second-degree murder and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison. All appeals for parole were refused and he died in hospital in Albany, New York, after being taken there from the Sullivan Correctional Facility in Fallsburg, where he had been serving his sentence.

Ronald DeFeo, murderer, born Brooklyn, New York, 26 Sept 1951; died Albany, New York, 12 Mar 2021, aged 69.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

SPIDERS OF THE MIND

Yesterday morning, I woke after a very short night.

To my horror, when I turned to my still-sleeping wife, I saw that a long-legged, fist-sized spider was walking across her face.

I'm not particularly keen on spiders but my wife fears them and she had, coincidentally, had a nightmare about spiders the day before. I made a grab for the spider, desperate not to wake her: I could imagine the screams if she were to come to with this monster on her cheek. But the spider vanished under her. I now shook her awake and told her that I'd seen a 'tiny' insect on her. She sat up, sharpish – she's not keen on creepy-crawlies – and I hunted, determined to remove the beast, preferably without her seeing.

The attentive reader will know what is coming. There was absolutely nothing there. I had had a hypnopompic hallucination. These are waking visions that come in the morning when – so psychologists tell us – the line between dream and reality becomes blurred. The spider was bigger than anything you would find in continental Europe: it also had impossibly long and dainty legs. The spider, in fact, reminded me of the 'soot gremlins' in that great Studio Ghibli film *Totoro*: it had a slightly cartoonish quality, particularly in its movements. I'd talked of soot gremlins the

evening before while discussing the spiders in my wife's dream. My subconscious had evidently broken through into the waking world.

That early morning encounter fascinates me because it felt so real. I've sometimes had very low grade visual and aural hallucinations where I was aware that no one else present

would have shared the experience: i.e. it felt like a figment of my imagination as it was happening. This was not my impression here. I was anxious that my wife should not see the spider, which seemed absolutely physical: I grabbed at it. I said that the spider had a 'cartoonish quality': I was able to reason my way, subsequently, to its impossibility. But had I seen a smaller spider then I would have sworn in a court of law to its reality and argued that it had escaped.

I know from the Fairy Census how many people see fairies as they are going to sleep, in the middle of the night or in the morning as they are waking up. Ditto ghosts. Ditto aliens. As always with forteana, we are left with the impossible question. Are these encounters an artefact of our minds; or is there a moment where the scales that normally block our vision fall away? In this case, I prefer the former explanation; not least because I don't want that spider to be real...

Simon has edited *Sheridan Le Fanu's Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020).

HYPNOPOMPIC
VISIONS COME
IN THE MORNING
WHEN THE LINE
BETWEEN DREAM
AND REALITY IS
BLURRED



Dangling the disclosure carrot

NIGEL WATSON is unsurprised by the wild speculation stirred up by the Pentagon's UFO report

The promise of apparent UFO disclosure by the US Government in the form of the Pentagon's UAP report (see p2) has seen all manner of experts, sceptics and flying saucer fans crawl out of the woodwork. Robert Sheaffer, on his *Bad UFOs* blog, as usual put this in a wider context: "...the media elite and Congress are being played by a small, loosely connected group of people with bizarre ideas about science. It's easy to dismiss UFOs as a fantasy or a fad, but the money, the connections, and the power wielded by a group of UFO believers – embedded in the defense industry and bent on supplanting material science with a pseudoscientific mysticism straight from the History Channel's *Ancient Aliens* – poses a danger to America more real than a flying saucer."

Most of the people Sheaffer is referring to are well known on the UFO celebrity circuit and there is no need to give them any further ego-boosting publicity. Some claim they have official insights into the subject, but continue to play the "sworn to secrecy" card. You have to give credit to retired Navy physicist Dr Bruce Maccabee for laying his cards on the table; he predicted "that the US Navy's Special Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force (UAPTF) will confirm what civilian investigators have long suspected: some UAP are vehicles controlled by non-human intelligences (NHI)." He added that: "The origin(s) of these NHI is (are) unknown but they may come from other planets using transportation technology based on very advanced physical principles."

This, though, is a long way from the stated aims of the report: "The Department of Defense established the UAPTF to improve its understanding of, and gain insight into, the nature and origins of UAPs. The mission of the task force is to detect, analyse and catalog UAPs that could potentially pose a threat to US national security." In other words, the report is more concerned with collating UAP data – especially anything relating to the threat of unmanned terrestrial drones or other terrestrial aerial objects (see **FT406:38-43**) – than hunting for aliens and their ships squirmed away in Area 51, or the unveiling of NHI UAP operators. Indeed, the Pentagon attempted to cool expectations by giving information to the *New York Times* in early June, to the effect that after studying 144 reports from the past 20 years, including

aerial phenomena witnessed by Navy pilots in recent years (see **FT403:40-47**), they found no evidence they were caused by either US secret technology or extraterrestrial craft. Some sightings were probably caused by enemy governments experimenting with hypersonic technology, yet because of the ambiguity of the sightings, the possibility of alien spacecraft in our skies could not be entirely ruled out. In other words, the authors of the report have not come to any firm conclusions and are pandering to the alien lobbyists and believers by dangling the 'alien possibility' carrot.

Jack Brewer, writing on his *UFO Trail* blog, noted that in the 1960s the CIA operated Project Palladium to create 'ghost aircraft' in order to fool enemy radar systems. Since then, the US has evolved more sophisticated technology, including the Netted Emulation of Multi-Element Signature against Integrated Sensors (NEMESIS) system, which employs swarms of networked aerial and underwater



drones working with ships, submarines and aircraft to fool the enemy. As Jack puts it: "There is a large variety of exotic devices and classified aircraft populating our skies. Adding to the complexity are cutting-edge technologies designed to limit and confuse abilities to monitor and accurately interpret those objects." Understandably, the report will have a classified appendix that will deal with advanced technology of this nature.

All is not lost for the ET faction, as – rather surprisingly given its previous coyness about UFOs – NASA's new administrator, Bill Nelson, told CNN: "We don't know if it's extraterrestrial. We don't know if it's an enemy. We don't know if it's an optical phenomenon... And so the bottom line is, we want to know." NASA has not set up a formal task force, but NASA press secretary Jackie McGuinness stated: "There's not really a lot of data and... scientists should be free to follow these leads, and it shouldn't be stigmatised. This is a really interesting phenomenon and Americans are clearly interested in it [so if] the scientists want to investigate, they should." This is a very refreshing new attitude towards the question of UFOs, one in which they are integrated with NASA's search for extraterrestrial life.

However, Global UFO Disclosure Project Founder Steven Greer is not impressed, arguing that: "The latest Pentagon report

BELOW LEFT: NASA's new administrator, Bill Nelson: "The bottom line is we want to know"

continues a 75 year-long disinformation campaign." Gary Heseltine, Vice President of the International Coalition for Extraterrestrial Research (ICER), is equally unconvinced: "The bottom line is that the US do not, WILL NOT, admit that UFO/UAP is the most logical theory to explain the objects seen, and the mainstream media, if left unchallenged, will let them get away with it. Be prepared." ICER thinks the objects are definitely ET/non-human craft. Other theories are that this is all an elaborate plot to make us think there is an alien threat in order to galvanise and unite humanity, or that, due to their religious beliefs, the authorities do not want to admit that UFOs are evil and demonic in origin. Another theory suggests that for the report to admit that other countries possess technological superiority would make the US military look weak and incapable of dealing with the UAP threat. Luis Elizondo, who had a debatable role in previous UAP research (see **FT363:28** and *passim*), states categorically: "I think that there is certainly at this point enough data to demonstrate there is an interest in our nuclear technology, a potential to even interfere with that nuclear technology." He concludes that the UAP sightings represent "a different paradigm completely".

The *Baltimore Sun's* editorial board put things into perspective: "So while it's all very well to sit around the campfire and watch the assorted clips of stunned pilots or read eyewitness accounts or imagine objects travelling ultra-fast and turning on a dime, let's also keep it in context... What we have is a mystery, not a 1960s science fiction TV show." Nonetheless, they predict: "We are headed for a summer of X-Files..."

<https://badufos.blogspot.com/>; Bruce Maccabee website: www.brumac.mysite.com; Q&A with Bill Nelson: www.politico.com/news/2021/06/10/nasa-bill-nelson-q-a-493288?; Steven Greer website: SiriusDisclosure.com; 'Establishment of UAPTF': www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2314065/establishment-of-unidentified-aerial-phenomena-task-force/; www.baltimoresun.com/opinion/editorial/bs-ed-0603-ufo-report-20210602-adk6g3ypubhedmj3r47a2m7dem-story.html; <https://americanmilitarynews.com/2021/06/ufos-took-us-nuclear-systems-offline-repeatedly-former-pentagon-ufo-office-chief-says/>



Can you tell the people?

JENNY RANGLES prepares for disclosure – but what exactly is being disclosed and to what purpose?

Some years ago I was asked for an online interview about the infamous 1980 Rendlesham Forest case by the late writer Georgina Bruni (obit. **FT234:30**). It was for her book about the case, which she later called *You Can't Tell the People* and, after she explained this unusual phrase to me, I agreed.

While I have my reservations about that book – not least that she got wrong basic facts about something I wrote, which ended up upsetting another researcher – I would not hold that error against Georgina Bruni. We all make mistakes when dealing with complicated, nuanced matters such as the UFO mystery – I have made a few of my own in print. Moreover, her book remains very popular with UFO researchers and rightly so.

However, it was the book's unusual title that is my point here. It came from a time when former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher used those words to her about the disclosure of Government UFO knowledge. But why can you not tell the people? And, if that was once the case, what has changed? Because plenty of people in prominent positions do seem to have been breaking that rule and expressing thoughts that seem rather like... disclosure. The latest is Barack Obama, who openly revealed that UFOs were real on 18 May in a CBS TV interview, admitting that there was evidence he was privy to when US President. There are certainly some big questions about what he said. Would you really expose such a great secret in a TV interview? What did this admission actually mean? And was it laying the foundations for even bigger revelations? That assumes that there *are* bigger revelations to come. After all, admitting that UFOs exist is hardly the big deal it appears to be; it all depends on what you take the term 'UFO' to mean. Obama's words were actually fairly guarded. Notably, he did not call them UFOs but UAP, using the terminology employed by many credible UFO researchers and adopted by both the US and UK governments.

So it is not a given that when the ex-President admitted UFOs are real he meant what you are assuming he meant. Even 'UFO' is a loaded term that means different things to different people, and Obama was fairly clear in what he was referring to here: the kind of evidence caught on film from military pilots tracking unidentified things in their airspace.

He actually said: "There is footage of objects in the skies... we cannot explain



how they moved... we don't know exactly what they are." It is a statement any rational person should make on the evidence – and a long way from saying the aliens are here.

Consider someone asking you if you believe in heaven. If you are an atheist, you would answer no, citing science and the nature of human biology; but if you have any kind of religious faith, then you likely would answer differently and understand what you meant by your reply in the context of your own religious perception. A Buddhist, who might see heaven as a stopover before the next lifetime of learning on Earth, would have a very different concept of that word to other religions, where heaven might be a glorious rest or some kind of reward.

Terms like UFO (or, indeed, UAP, however less emotive we try to make it) are always going to create an impression that varies depending on the audience. We take meaning at least as much from what we *think* a word means as from what the person speaking it might actually have intended it to suggest. It is very possible Obama's real concern about the UAP footage shot by US pilots was of some terrestrial military breakthrough of non-US origin, or even the work of some rich tech genius – nothing to do with little green men.

As such, disclosure – if indeed that was the purpose in any sense of Obama speaking on TV – might here have had the opposite intention to what many might think. In other words, it was not to prepare the public for some grand revelation that we are not alone in the cosmos (a likely reality we may one day indeed have to deal with, regardless of UFOs) but to explain a reality that both UFO researchers and governments have slowly figured out over the decades

LEFT: Barack Obama talks UFOs on US TV.

of studying data: that UAP are here and real and baffling and very likely the result of more than one phenomenon that we have not quite figured out. Some of them are probably rare events that lie outside of our science because they have been misinterpreted for centuries. Indeed, our current 'little green men' interpretation will be seen years from now as akin to how an early human saw an eclipse and assumed a monster was eating the Sun. It's hard for us humans to think we are not all-knowing – but we're really not.

Of course, it is possible that aliens do exist, covertly observing us and wisely staying out of the way of trigger-happy Earthlings. Maybe there is a government awareness of that, and the sharing of footage that cannot be denied, given its military provenance, is part of some plan to ease us gently into the Earth-shattering revelation of 'disclosure'.

Time will tell. But I think the big thing to take on board is that Mrs Thatcher, from today's perspective, was wrong. Not telling the people might have seemed sensible when nobody really knew what was going on, as admitting ignorance of a potential threat is harmful to any government that has to create at least an illusion of being in control. However, once the evidence for whatever is going on becomes overt and incontrovertible, then saying nothing is also like admitting you have no control.

So I suspect one of two things is going on here. Either UAP are really something nobody yet understands and that until that changes – as a sort of holding statement – we are allowed to think whatever we want to think; again, at least an illusion of it all being under control is created.

The alternative is that this is step one of a gradual move towards disclosure of the knowledge of an intelligence beyond our own – not necessarily even one originating in deep space. If they are co-existing in some way here on Earth or in a parallel reality, then in some sense this may actually be worse news than invading aliens: "Hey all of you – we just wanted to let you know we are not actually the dominant species on Earth as was previously believed..."

If so, then what we get told will be limited to what we can handle. So perhaps Maggie wasn't so wrong after all. Maybe you *can't* tell the people the truth – at least not all of it at once...

Space Liberace

In 1989, a small town in Alabama experienced a UFO flap – but when a British tabloid newspaper suggested that the late entertainer Liberace had descended from a banana-shaped UFO, things got a lot weirder. **JEFFREY VALLANCE** explores the emergence of a cosmic archetype: “Space Liberace”.

Over the years, there have been countless stories that I have immensely enjoyed in *Fortean Times*, but I have to agree with Paul Sieveking’s choice as one of his favourites, from “Here Is the News” [FT390:45]:

Liberace Returns

On 10 February 1989 the inhabitants of the tiny town of Fyffe in Alabama witnessed the return to Earth of the late glittering pianist Liberace – double-size, 12ft (3.6m) tall – who descended from a golden banana-shaped spacecraft via a moving stairway and played a medley of Hollywood show-stoppers with glowing fingers on a floating piano. Talk of the apparition brought chaos to the town with 4,000 cars jamming the main street on 6 March. A “UFO expert” said: “Too many people have seen strange things for it to be a hoax.” (*Portsmouth News*, *Daily Star*, 7 Mar 1989 [original report FT55:33].

The report involving Liberace’s glorious return to Earth aboard a UFO at first seems totally unbelievable, until the component details of the story are broken down into separate sections – with the 12-foot-tall glittering Liberace apparition, the banana-shaped spacecraft, the moving stairway, the glowing fingers, and the importance of the Fyffe landing site, along with the ensuing chaos in Alabama.

Władziu Valentino Liberace (American pianist, singer and actor) known as “Lee” to his friends and “Walter” to his family, was born on 16 May 1919 in West Allis, Wisconsin (a suburb of Milwaukee), and died on 4 February 1987 in Palm Springs, California; or, if you would rather believe Liberace is not of this Earth, on 4 February 1987 he returned to his homeworld, the planet Pompadore.

It is no coincidence that Liberace appeared on *The Jackie Gleason Show* on CBS on 25 November 1967. As any UFO buff knows, in 1969 Jackie Gleason was invited by



LEFT: A newspaper from March 1989 records the influx of UFO-seekers to the small town of Fyffe, Alabama.

Heaven, began its run, depicting the entertainer’s heavenly “trial” following his death. Whether it is labelled “Heaven” (the abode of God and the blessed dead), “the heavens” (the expanse of sky and space over the Earth), or a “heavenly body” (a planet, star, or other celestial body), Liberace is in the Great Beyond. Thus, his reappearance as an apparition can be

likened to a divine vision of a saint or other religious figure.

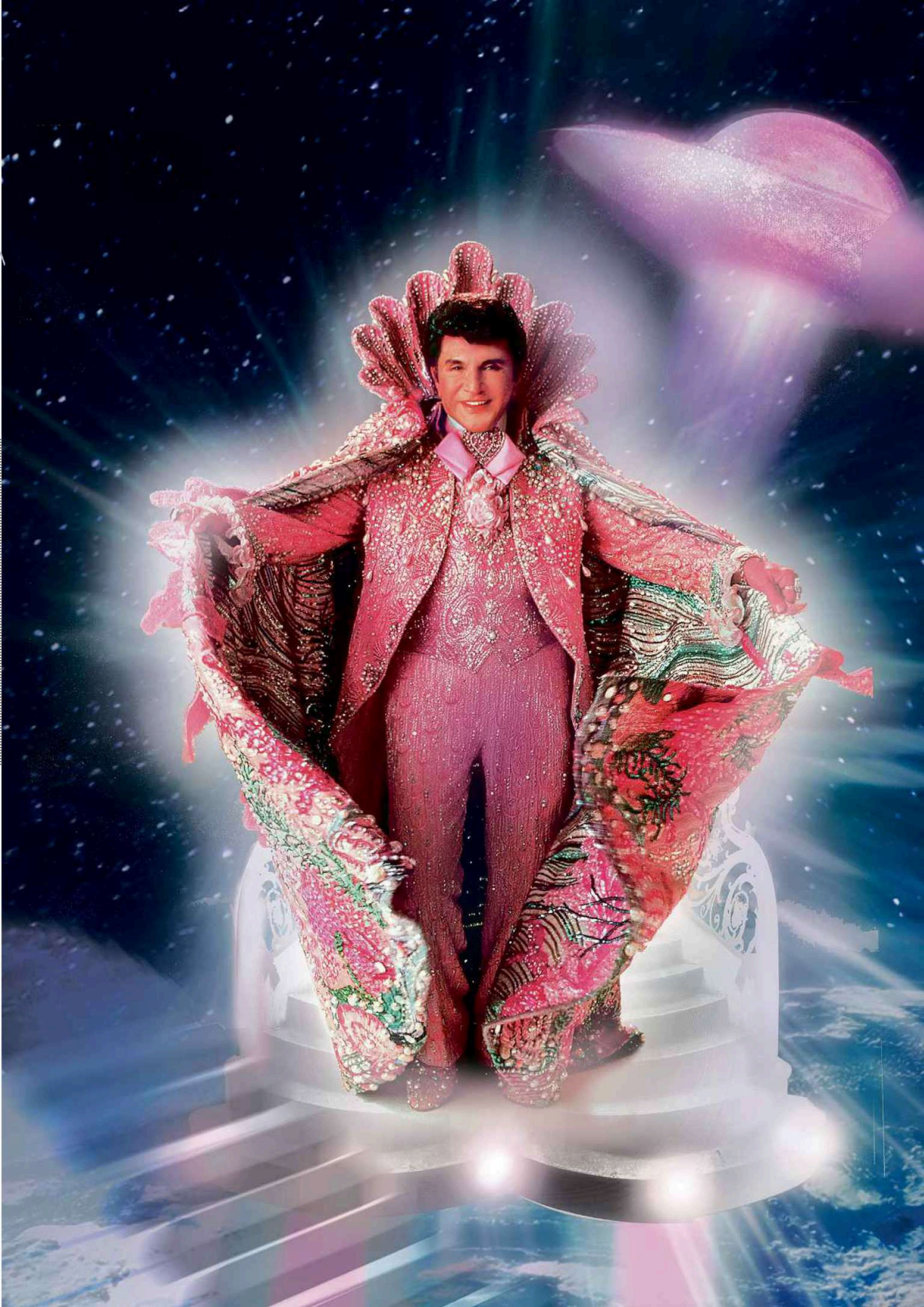
*His reappearance
as an apparition
can be likened to a
divine vision*

President Richard Nixon to Homestead Air Force Base in Florida to view the dead aliens recovered from the Roswell crash of 1947. Gleason even constructed his house in the shape of an UFO, naming it “The Mothership” (for the full story, see FT366:30-36). In what I believe is Liberace’s most memorable movie scene, he played the part of a casket salesman in *The Loved One* (1965), based on Evelyn Waugh’s satire of the funeral industry and Forest Lawn Cemetery in Southern California. And, as life imitates art, Liberace’s body is presumably entombed with those of his mother and his brother George, at Forest Lawn Cemetery, Hollywood Hills, in Los Angeles. In 2009 at the Leicester Square Theatre in London, *Liberace: Live from*

THE LAS VEGAS TRIANGLE

Here I must disclose that in 1995 I moved to Las Vegas, near the Liberace Museum. At the museum, I curated an infiltration/intervention/exhibition entitled “Mr Showmanship”, which featured Liberace-themed artworks from local and internationally known artists. The artworks were mingled with Liberace’s glittering costumes and opulently lavish *objets d’art*. It was hard to tell which pieces belonged in the museum and which were art. The museum’s director, Dora Liberace (wife of Liberace’s late brother, George), told me: “Liberace is smiling down from Heaven”. At the time, I didn’t think to take it literally.

From 1974 till his death in 1987, Liberace lived in a fabulous mansion close to his museum and the UNLV (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) campus, where I was teaching. After 31 years, the museum closed its doors for the last time in October 2010. Maybe it closed due to waning interest in the performer, as younger people didn’t know who he was, but I believe the closure was due to the fact that the museum never acknowledged that he was gay. At the museum, Liberace could have been honoured as a gay icon from a none-too-distant era when sexual gender identity





JEFFREY VALLANCE

ABOVE LEFT: The exterior "Wall of Music" decoration at the Liberace Museum in Las Vegas, which housed the entertainer's costumes, pianos and automobiles. ABOVE RIGHT: Jeffrey Vallance at the Museum in 1995. BELOW: Liberace's rare Conover "Pompadour" model piano, which was auctioned in 2013.

had to be communicated via coded language and innuendo. The museum might have flourished and stayed relevant and more life-affirming if it had become LGBTQ-friendly, sponsoring festivals, Liberace lookalike contests and Vegas-y Pride parades.

The region in and around Las Vegas is known as a major UFO hotspot, with Area 51, the Nevada Test Site, the Extraterrestrial Highway and the Little A'Le'Inn all nearby. One day in 1998 while driving home from teaching, I saw what looked like an enormous white paper airplane hovering motionless in the midday sky above McCarran International Airport. I could tell it was huge, as it had the same haze (aerial perspective) around it as the nearby mountains. Airplanes landing near the object appeared the size of flies. As one sees a lot of weird stuff every day in Vegas, I thought nothing of it and nearly forgot about it. It wasn't until I got back to my apartment and turned on a local talk-radio programme that I heard people reporting the object as a triangular UFO. Then WHACK! It dawned on me what I had just seen. It seemed that, as my brain had no compartment in which to file the strange occurrence, my memory of it had been almost wiped clean – like a fading dream. The triangular UFO mothership, over a mile long, took a position in the centre of something like a "Las Vegas Triangle," with McCarran Airport, UNLV and the Liberace Museum at the vertex points. My apartment in the Living Desert complex and Liberace's mansion were both contained within the obtuse triangle, with the UFO at the centroid position.

THE BATTLE LORD OF THE POMPADORANS

On the Internet a new mythology is evolving to fill in the gaps of the life and exploits of Space Liberace. According to *Encyclopaedia Daemonica*, "Liberace, before he returned to his homeworld, revealed to sources that he was, in fact, not of this Earth. His home planet, 'Pompadore' as it would sound in the hu-



man tongue, went to war with their Sun. Being for that reason alone, Liberace departed from us in the physical sense and now fights the good fight elsewhere in the Galaxy. His fans may now know that in addition to being a Master of the Ivories he is, in reality, also a noted Battle Lord of cosmic proportion. He alone is credited with the sacking and total annihilation of 17 races of beings throughout the cosmos. He has earned a reputation as a sadistic, enigmatic commander." Liberace often said, "If you do not know tragedy, you cannot know FAAAAABULOUS".

As a child on Earth, Space Liberace mastered the art of makeup to cover his greyish alien skin, so he could play with the other children. It took him 15 years to emulate the way the human body moves. As he was learning, he was the subject of a tremendous amount of teasing by schoolyard bullies.

And his penchant for eccentricities and attention-getting practices that earned him some popularity also made him the object of ridicule.

It was during his teen years, in his human lifespan, that he took a keen interest in Renaissance France, noting, "They had the best hair." The pompadour is a hairstyle named after Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764), the mistress of Louis XV. Today, most people refer to the pompadour as a man's hairstyle with extra volume on the top. Related is the Pompadour Bird or pompadour cotinga (*Xipholena punicea*), a small bird from the Amazon rainforest; the males exhibit sexual dimorphism with elaborate bright reddish-purple plumage, similar to a Liberace costume. In addition, Liberace owned a rare Conover "Pompadour" model piano, named after the 18th century French design it emulates. This model's soundboard is directly in front of the pianist's head (like the hairstyle), so the sound is very immediate and direct. It is thought that there are only three pianos of this kind in the Universe. And besides, Liberace was such a neat freak that he designed and patented a "disappearing toilet" that would fold up and retract into the bathroom wall. Regarding his triumph, Liberace would often say: "There's just no reason why you should walk into a bathroom and see a toilet".

Early in life, Liberace recognised that musical notes were a type of language. He adopted the piano as his instrument of communication. Musical notes on planet Pompadore are used to coordinate military strikes with their grand space armadas. Many interstellar wars were carried out behind the veil of his Vegas Shows. Liberace, known as the "King of Bling", had extravagant tastes. His philosophy was "too much of a good thing is wonderful." As for his over-the-top performances, he'd say, "I'm a one-man Disneyland". And, according to *Daemonica*, "He danced and sang his way into our hearts, all

the while annihilating civilisations throughout the cosmos". He was staging invasions on a galactic scale right from the stage during his Vegas performances!

It is a documented fact that Liberace had an identical twin that died at birth. Could it be that his twin didn't really die, but it was *him* that was abducted? And like the scenario of the "Evil Twin" plotline, there is both an earthly benevolent Liberace and an evil Space Liberace?

UFO OVER FYFFE

The small town of Fyffe in DeKalb County, Alabama, made news in 1989 when local residents reported a series of UFO sightings. On 11 February, a woman called the Fyffe Police Department and reported seeing a strange light in the sky. Later the police reported seeing a large lighted object silently passing over them in the direction of a local landmark called Lookout Mountain. A call over police radio from neighbouring Crossville described the same object crossing over their town. Numerous other strange sightings were reported. By the next day, more than 100 residents, including the town's police chief and his assistant, had reported seeing an object in the sky. It was described as metallic, triangular or boomerang-shaped, hovering at an angle and outlined by green lights with a bright red light centred on its underside. One witness described the craft as banana-shaped. For several weeks, it appeared over Fyffe every Friday night like clockwork, setting off a frenzy of interest, with as many as 5,000 sightseers and hundreds of news organisations descending upon Fyffe.

When the British tabloid *Daily Star* reported that Liberace was seen stepping out of a UFO to play a floating piano, thousands more people flocked to Fyffe, crowding the streets in hopes of experiencing their own sighting. The roads around Fyffe were jammed, with six miles of Alabama State Highway 75 clogged with RVs, motorhomes and satellite TV trucks. Helicopters soared overhead like an invasion of locusts. Hordes of tourists looked skyward as they tramped through cow pastures. In commemoration of the sighting, Fyffe now annually celebrates the UFO Days Festival, standing for the "Unforgettable Family Outing." Fyffe thought it was time to capitalise on the notoriety it received during the UFO-sighting craze. The Fyffe festival features hot air balloons shaped like space aliens, arts and crafts booths, face painting, children's games, food vendors, an antique tractor display, and kiddie train rides. The festival also includes Mr Andy Woods (from the nearby town of Fort Payne), as a "Barney Fyffe" impersonator, (the character "Barney Fife" was made famous by Don Knotts on *The Andy Griffith Show* in the 1960s). The town of Fyffe has greatly benefited from the Liberace UFO sighting, with revenues from the festival funding a 220-acre industrial park, two miles of paved streets, an extended sewer line, and Fyffe's first traffic light on Highway 75. In 1989, the Alabama state senate officially designated Fyffe as "The UFO

Tabloid reports Liberace seen in Fyffe UFO

UFO sightings generate zany reports

By DENNIS BENEFIELD
The Times-Journal Managing Editor

A British tabloid reported Tuesday that residents of Fyffe, Alabama, saw entertainer Liberace descend from an unidentified flying object and perform Hollywood showtunes on a floating piano.

A physician in Kansas claims that extraterrestrials say UFO sightings will increase in Alabama.

And a New York resident believes that UFO sightings are actually alien spacecraft.

Those are among the more bizarre reports sparked by a series of UFO sightings near Fyffe that began on Feb. 10.

Fyffe policeman Fred Works was interviewed by the BBC — the British Broadcasting Corporation — on Tuesday. Such interviews are routine since he reported seeing a UFO.

"It does get wild sometimes," Works said. In between phone calls, he scheduled two television interviews Tuesday.

"I stay on the phone all the time when I come in the office," he said. "I try to talk to anybody if they are serious. I hate to refuse to talk to people."

What Works and fellow Fyffe police officer Junior Garmany saw Feb. 10 remains unexplained. Both watched a large object fly over them. It had lights on it and did not make any sound.

"It was huge and it was moving on," Works said. "It passed over our heads and we watched it go out of sight. But there was no noise. That is what surprised me."

Others in the area reported similar unexplained sightings that night and on subsequent nights.

Since then the town has become a popular place on Friday nights, as sightseers come to watch the skies.

Newspaper, radio, television and magazine reporters are also interested in Fyffe, seeking out anyone who might have seen something. Some reports exaggerate the sightings and many are unflattering to the rural south.

Works was particularly disappointed with a TV report on the nationally syndicated show "Inside Edition," which aired last week.

The crew had Works and Garmany re-enact a reported sighting. But the video was fast-forwarded during the report, which showed the officers racing off with blue lights flashing in pursuit of a UFO.

But other reports are even more zany.

A British tabloid, *The Daily Star*, had a half-page article on the Fyffe UFOs in its March 7 edition.

The paper reported that thousands were flocking to the "tiny town of Fyffe, Alabama" in the hopes of seeing the late entertainer Liberace.

The tabloid reported that residents of Fyffe had seen Liberace, dressed in a "sparkling gold lame suit," descend from a movable staircase and perform "Singing in the Rain," and "Laura's Theme" on a floating piano.

"He had a lovely, serene smile," the paper reported, and "flexed his long, bony" fingers at Fyffe residents. A BBC spokesman said the report was not taken seriously by British readers.

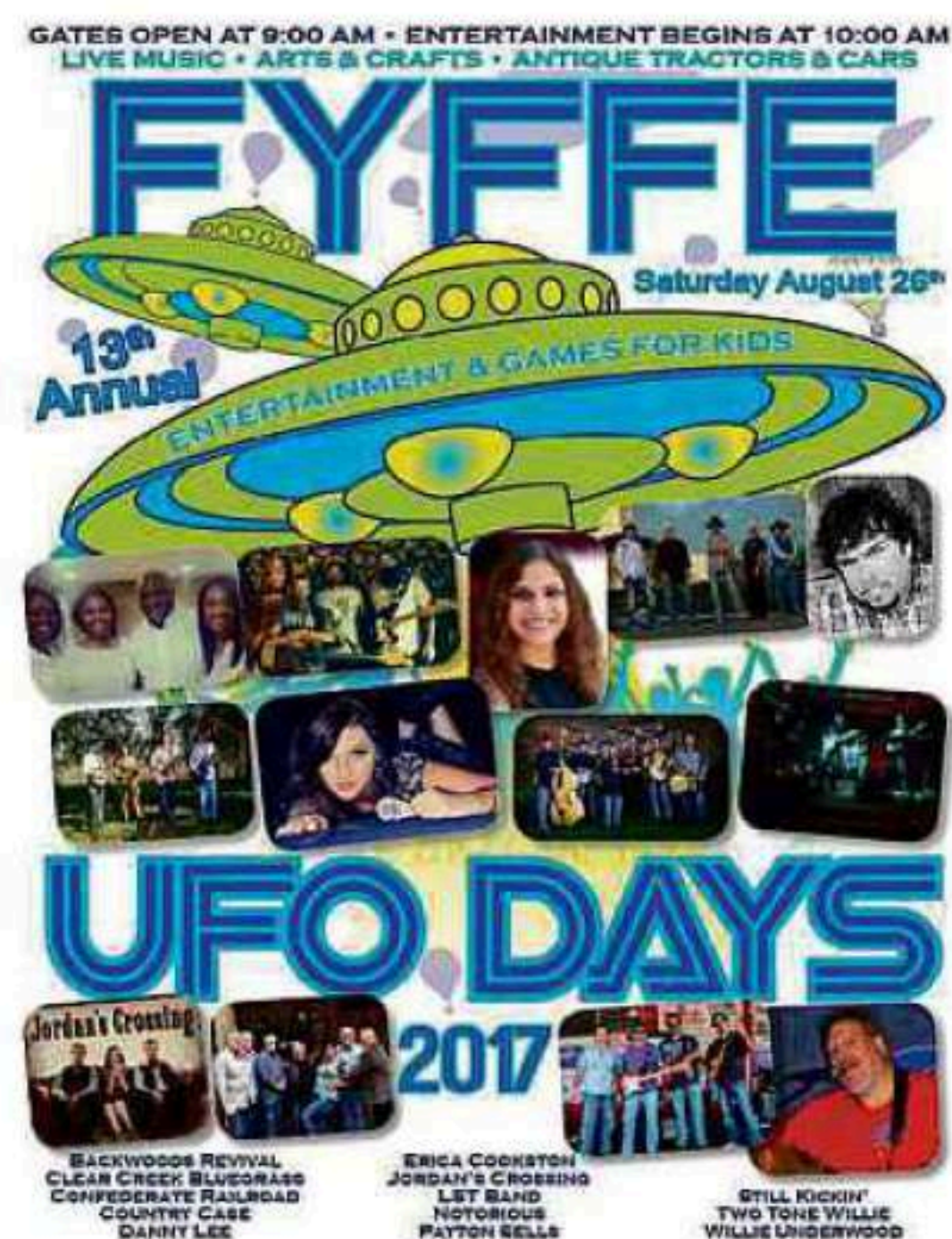
Works doesn't take such reports seriously either.

But the calls do disrupt the routine at Fyffe City Hall. "When we're not here the ladies in the office have to take messages," Works said, adding that the callers "will talk to anybody," whether they have seen a UFO or not.

The result, according to Vicki Cooper, of *UFO* magazine, is that rumors and hype get confused with fact. She said her magazine attempts to take a serious look at sightings. She said sighting reports were accelerating nationwide. "This is not just an isolated case," she said.

She said it may be coincidence, but sightings increase when the economy worsens or in times of national crisis. She added that most sightings remain unexplained.

Works would like an explanation of what he saw. But he knows it was not Liberace. "It was really Elvis," he said.



LEFT: A report in the Fort Payne *Times Journal* (8 March 1989) mentions the UK *Daily Star*'s addition of Liberace to the Fyffe UFO story. ABOVE: The town now commemorates the events of 1989 with its annual "UFO Days" festival.

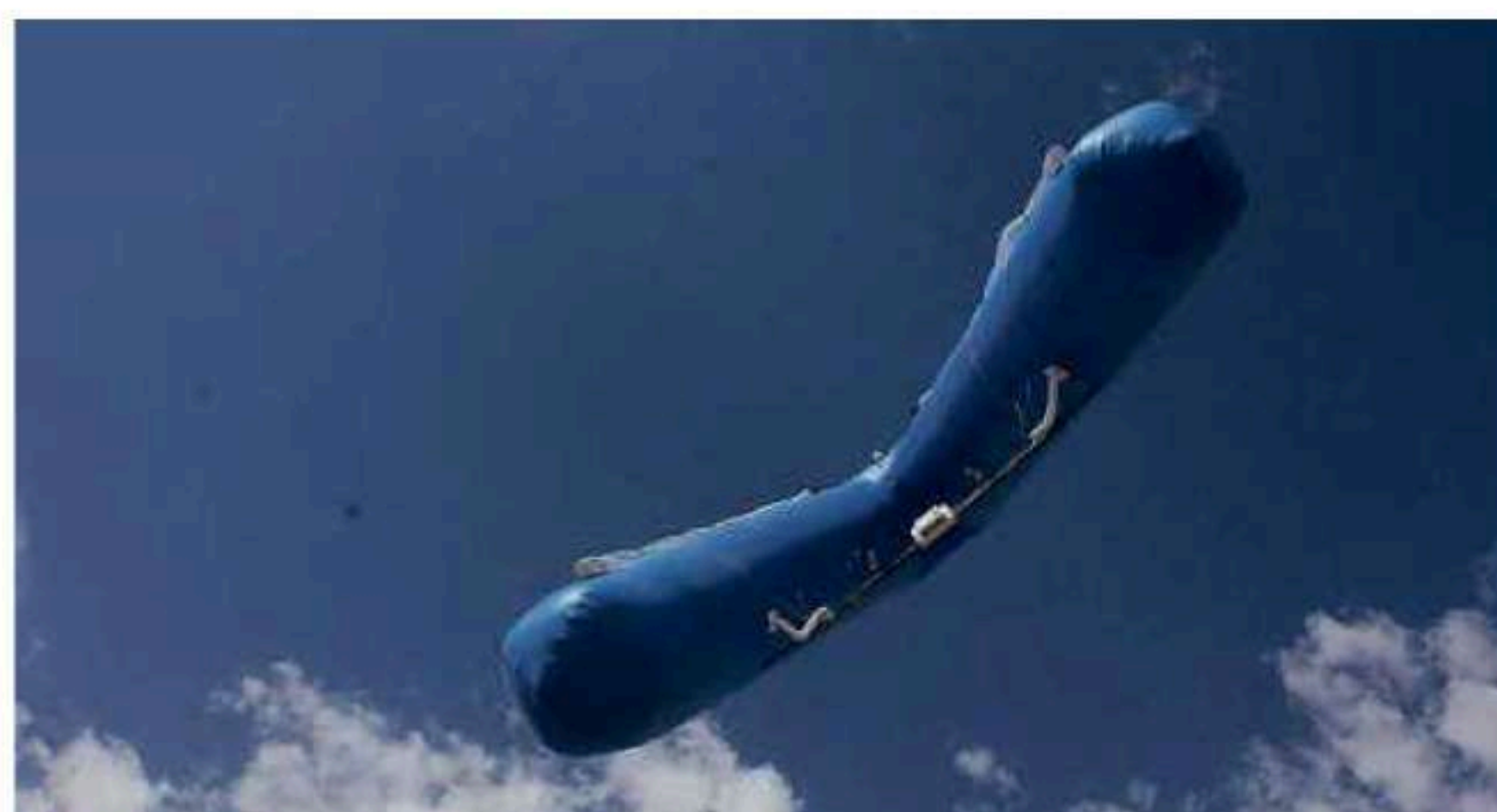
Capitol of Alabama". More recently, when Fyffe Mayor Howard Mitchell was asked about the Liberace UFO experience, he lamented, "I wish we could get somebody to see another one." And noted cryptozoologist and lake-monster researcher Scott Mardis recently stated: "If there wasn't a real Space Liberace, we would have to invent one."

As Space Liberace flies a banana-shaped UFO, he obviously must have thought it was a great prank to land in Fyffe, a name synonymous with bananas. It is no coincidence that Space Liberace chose Fyffe, Alabama, as the first landing site for his banana-shaped UFO. In April 1989, Jenny Randles reported in *Northern UFO News*: "The one time I agreed to speak to the [*Daily*] *Star* was when they asked for my comments on the UFO that was shaped like a banana. It landed, you see, to disgorge dead pianist Liberace playing *Singing in the Rain* and the theme from *Dr Zhivago* in front of astonished Alabama witnesses. When they told me that the town was called Fyffe and I casually pointed out that the link with Fyffes bananas the reporter said, 'Oh — we never noticed that' — but they carried the story anyway as 'Liberace back from the dead in a UFO' [7 Mar] (without either my, or anyone else's cautionary remarks, needless to say)."

Fyffes is a well-known banana company owned by the Japanese Sumitomo Group and headquartered in Dublin, Ireland. In 1888, Edward Wathen Fyffe, a London food wholesaler, founded Fyffes in Britain. In 1929, Fyffes was first to use blue stickers on bananas. The company currently markets bananas in Europe and the United States. In 1990, a brutal "Banana War" broke out between Fyffes and Chiquita Brands International for dominance of the banana industry. Chiquita initiated the war with rival Fyffes over the limited banana supply. Chiquita began illegally seizing and destroying Fyffes' shipments. A full-blown conflict ensued, with an attempted car bombing, kidnappings, military dictators, Communist revolutionaries, terrorist groups, as well as weapon smuggling, and drug smuggling with ties to Mexican drug baron Joaquín Guzmán ("El Chapo"), leader of the Sinaloa Cartel. The banana industry was fraught with corporate and political greed, horrific violence, and egregious violations of basic human rights. Banana plantation workers protested until the army of General Cortes Vargas, the leader of the Colombian military forces, opened fire on a group of families after their Sunday morning Mass, killing over 1,000 people. The appalling incident was known as the "Banana Massacre".

BANANA-SHAPED UFO

Many people have ridiculed the Fyffe banana-shaped UFO account. However, according to one of the now published reports from the British Ministry of Defence of previously classified UFO documents, a banana-like object was also seen over London. In May 1989, The RAF reported aerial phenomena in the form of a crescent-shaped object like a banana that was blue in colour with appendages hanging from its lower end.



ABOVE LEFT: An artist's impression of Liberace's banana spaceship. ABOVE RIGHT: The Ascender 36 Airship. BELOW: The RAF sketch of the banana-shaped UFO.

The RAF station located in West Drayton, within the London borough of Hillingdon, serves as the main centre for military air traffic control in the UK. The RAF UFO report included a sketch of a banana-shaped object with little spindly arms and legs dangling from the bottom end. Which brings us back to Fyffes bananas, whose corporate mascot is amazingly similar to the banana-shaped UFO because of its banana costume complete with gangling arms and legs.

There is another flying object nearly identical to the banana UFO seen over London: that is the Ascender 36 Airship by JP Aerospace of Rancho Cordova, California. The aerospace firm, funded by the US Department of Defense, is developing a whole new way to reach space. They are testing the high-altitude orbital airship to float on the top of the atmosphere, and then slowly accelerate using hybrid electrochemical rocket engines until it reaches orbital velocity. For the diaphanous hypersonic airship to fly at the edge of space it will need to be over a mile long and incredibly light. Ascenders are "V" shaped airships designed to ultimately replace rocket-launched space vehicles. Ascenders climb vertically until they reach peak altitude. Research balloons have carried people and machines to the edge of space for over 70 years and JP Aerospace is developing the technology to fly an airship directly to orbit. Remarkably similar to the banana UFO seen by the RAF over London, the Ascender 36 Airship has a blue outer skin with overhanging apparatuses that look similar to dangling arms and legs – and when viewed at a certain angle, it can appear banana-shaped. Furthermore, Charles Fort wrote of "phantom airships" appearing out of nowhere over England in *New Lands* (1923) and *Lo!* (1931). The objects were described as gigantic sausage-shaped craft with extremely powerful searchlights. The sound of a motor or small engine was heard overhead. Fort speculated that these intelligently controlled objects could be of extraterrestrial origin.

TIN FOIL ALIEN

On 17 October 1973, in Falkville, Alabama, Chief of Police Jeff Greenhaw received an emergency call from

The character of 'Space Liberace' is developing into a new archetype

a woman who claimed that a UFO had just landed in a field. When Greenhaw arrived at the scene, he saw a humanoid entity wearing some kind of silvery, metallic suit that resembled thick aluminium foil. He immediately grabbed his 400 Series Polaroid Countdown 90 camera and shot one controversial blurry photograph. The flash of the camera startled the entity and it began running across the field faster than humanly possible, using spring-like jumps. Greenhaw leapt into his police cruiser and took off in pursuit of the "tin foil man", who outran the vehicle and disappeared into the darkness (for more metallic/silvery aliens, see **FT196:29, 286:28-29, 305:28, 29, 397:36-41, 399:69, 400:72-73**).

The Liberace UFO appeared over Fyffe, Alabama, which is 73 miles (117km) from Falkville, where the "alien" in the silvery suit was sighted. In his concert performances, Liberace would often wear a silvery sequined and rhinestone-studded suit. On 23 April 1955 in Las Vegas, Liberace met Elvis and they exchanged suit coats. Afterward, Elvis was inspired to create his own rhinestone-encrusted jumpsuits that he'd often wear while performing in Vegas. Liberace's glittery outfits have inspired legions of entertainers like David Bowie, Elton John and Lady Gaga. In Lady Gaga's song *Dance in the Dark* (2010), she sings the line, "We'll haunt like Liberace". (Lady Gaga is summoning one of her foremost muses: the spirit of Liberace. It is reported that Mr Showmanship's ghost haunts the bedroom of the Liberace Mansion in Vegas). Could it be possible that, in the dead of night, an unexpected appearance of Liberace in a sparkling suit could be confused with an alien creature from outer space? What would be easier

to write on a police report relating to a UFO landing – encountering a metallic alien or seeing an apparition of Liberace wearing a silvery outfit?

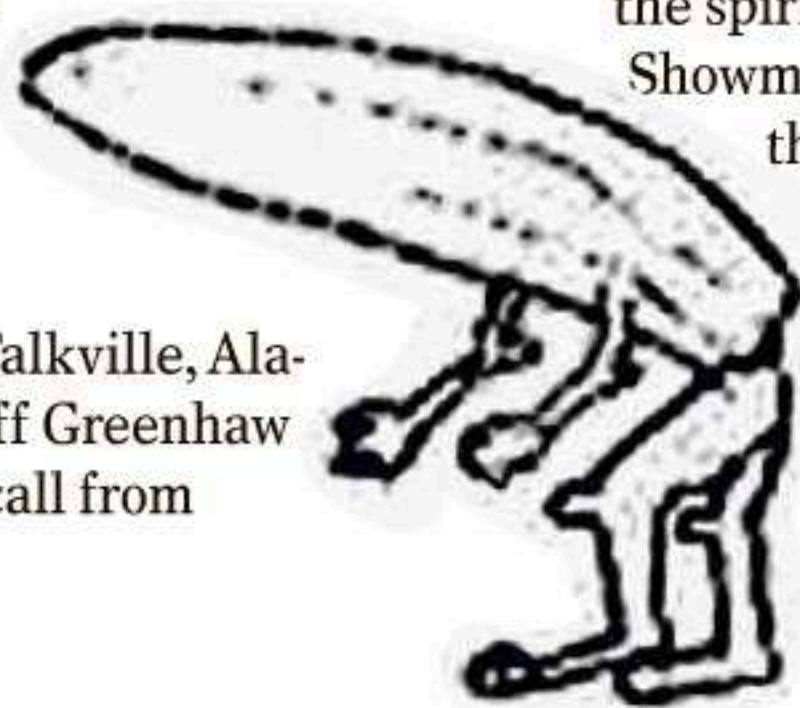
On 14 March 1989, The BBC interviewed Fyffe Assistant Police Chief, Fred Works, concerning the Liberace UFO event. Officer Works said that he'd like a rational explanation of what he saw, but he knows it was *not* Liberace. "It was really Elvis," he snapped over the air. Which reminds me of a popular song by American Country singer-songwriter Ray Stevens entitled, *I Saw Elvis in a UFO* that includes the verse:

I saw Elvis in a UFO singing them rhythm and blues

And Liberace was there and he had on a pair of Imelda Marcos' shoes

FLAMBOYANT ALIEN ARCHETYPE

The character of "Space Liberace" is developing into a new kind of archetype: an extraterrestrial that wears extravagant glittering outfits with fabulous pompadoured hair. One of the first Space Liberace archetypes appeared in "The Squire of Gothos", an episode of *Star Trek* that first aired on 12 January 1967. Actor William Campbell stars as the flamboyant Liberace-like character, Trelane, who plays the harpsichord clad in extravagant 18th century attire. And which Guardians of the Galaxy character is basically Space Liberace? In the film *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), according to the original script, the character "The Collector", played by Benicio Del Toro, is likened to an "outer-space Liberace". Blogger Jacob Shelton writes in his online *Groovy History*: "Władziu Valentino Liberace, the pianist who made the whole world love classical music, and cried all the way to the bank, may have seemed like an alien from outer space, but he actually came from Wisconsin, of all places". A couple of outer-spacy songs have been written expounding the exploits of interplanetary Space Liberace. In 1999, the Seattle-based improvisational quartet Ponga released their interstellar tune "Liberace In Space", although the 2009 "party mix" version is more otherworldly and techno-alien-sounding. More recently in 2020, singer-songwriter Spooks McGhie came out with the album *Gefilte Fish* that includes the especially ethereal track "Space Liberace".





ABOVE LEFT: The Falkville alien in his silvery suit. **ABOVE RIGHT:** William Campbell as Trelane in the 1967 *Star Trek* episode "The Squire of Gothos"; many impressionable young viewers apparently believed that this flamboyant, harpsichord-playing alien was Liberace. **BELOW:** And it's easy to see why. A 1974 photo by Allan Warren.

THREE (OR MORE) SEPARATE VISIONS OF THE LIBERACE UFO

According to the *Daily Star* (7 March 1989), when Liberace landed in Fyffe, he wore a sparkling gold lame suit and descended on a moveable staircase performing a rendition of *Singing in the Rain* and *Lara's Theme* on a floating piano. He had a lovely smile as he flexed his long bony fingers. Note: Space Liberace is not to be confused with a weather balloon – the typical UFO excuse; since Betty Furman, a research scientist at the National Scientific Balloon Facility (a NASA contractor) reported that what people saw in Fyffe on 10 February 1989 *could not be a weather balloon*, as all SFRs (scientific research balloons) were accounted for, deflated, and retrieved prior to that date.

On 4 April 1989, the *Weekly World News* reported that the recently deceased Liberace was not really dead, but had in fact been kidnapped by aliens. He had returned briefly to Earth in a UFO that hovered over a cornfield near Cotija de la Paz, Mexico (a region known for its strong salty cheese). Incidentally, the menu of the "World Famous" restaurant in Athens, Georgia, features dishes with "Liberace Sauce" and cotija cheese. According to Tripadvisor, "the Liberace sauce is fantastic." In Mexico, a local farmer named Miguel Ortiz Diago and his wife Maria both beheld the Liberacian apparition (bringing to mind Juan Diego's Marian apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe). The flamboyant entertainer arrived like a flash in the night sky in a banana-yellow flying saucer, the door opened and out he came in a glittering silver suit – he was literally walking on air. He then sat on an invisible seat and played on an invisible piano "the most beautiful music they had ever heard". Maria noticed that when he smiled his teeth sparkled like diamonds. After a 15-minute performance, Liberace re-



entered the spacecraft, the door closed and it ascended straight upward and vanished in the heavens. A few minutes later, a neighbour named Pablo deVega arrived on the scene to say that he too had witnessed the astounding appearance of the late Vegas entertainer.

The 24 October 2005 edition of the *Weekly World News* reported that on 29 July 1989, the third landing of Space Liberace was witnessed in a field north of Toulouse, France. According to the report, Liberace was not dead, but aliens had abducted him and he had returned to Earth in a gleaming silver UFO. Over 2,000 people attending the *Toulouse d'Été* outdoor music festival saw the glittering Showman. Liberace descended from the craft to land onstage, where he stole the spotlight. The former mayor of Toulouse, Guy Favier, said: "He walked to the stage, where he approached the grand piano, sat down and began to play – I must say, he never sounded better." The concertgoers were so excited that they wanted to mob the stage,

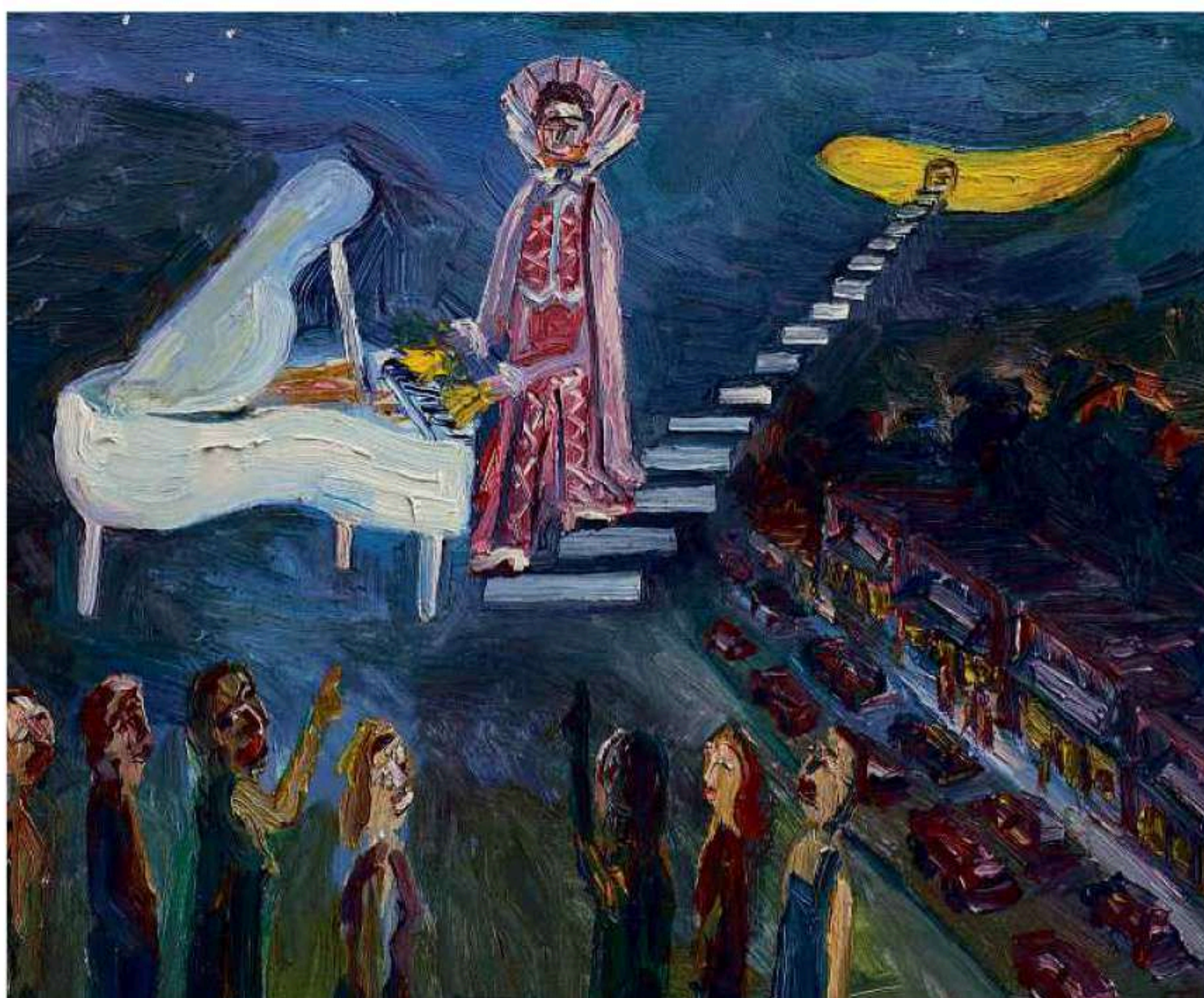
but nobody could move, as if they were held in place by a forcefield or an "unseen hand". Liberace played for several minutes without saying a word, then casually strolled back to his starship – which instantly zoomed away at warp speed.

And there may be a fourth sighting of the fashionable alien in a silvery outfit. The 9 October 1989 edition of TASS (the Soviet press agency), reported that on 27 September of that year, a UFO landed in a park in the Russian city of Voronezh, 300 miles (480km) southeast of Moscow. Lieutenant Sergei A Matveyev of the Voronezh District Police said he saw the spaceship and "it was not an optical illusion. It certainly was an object flying in the sky, moving noiselessly at very high speed." According to the official report, the alien was 9ft to 12ft (2.7-3.7m) tall, "fashionably dressed in silvery overalls and bronze boots", and arrived in a "banana-shaped" spaceship. (Sounds like another manifestation of the King of Bling). Correspondingly, in the same year, Space Liberace was seen in Fyffe with a banana-shaped UFO – he was also 12 feet tall and wearing a stunning silvery outfit. Maybe the Russians are not that familiar with Liberace so they could not identify him correctly. Could this Russian report be describing a different interpretation of the same event?

THE UK CONNECTION

And there is an intriguing British connection to the Fyffe Liberace UFO incident. America's love for Liberace is only rivalled by Britain's adoration for the flamboyant performer. In 1960, Liberace performed at the London Palladium in an acclaimed "command performance," now known as the Royal Variety Performance for Queen Elizabeth. Her Majesty was such a big fan of Liberace that she presented him with a Welsh corgi.

ALLAN WARREN



LEFT: The Fyffe incident, as visualised by artist John Kilduff. ABOVE: The *Weekly World News* added to the 'Space Liberace' mythos with a further 1989 sighting. BELOW: Flying Liberace in Vegas.

About his royal audience, Liberace said: "I love pomp and ceremony."

One afternoon, when Liberace was house shopping in London, he took the British drag entertainer, Danny La Rue, along with him to see the Tower House in Holland Park. While in the strange Gothic Revival building (with creepy murals painted on the ceiling), a paranormal event occurred: Danny and Liberace encountered the forlorn ghosts of children who belonged to the grim orphanage that once occupied the site. (It is whispered that a child is buried somewhere in the tower).

As I stated earlier, a London banana monger named Edward Fyffe founded the Fyffes Banana Company in Britain in 1888. Between 1909 and 1913 a series of unidentified "phantom airships" were seen manoeuvring over England. It was the *Daily Star* that first reported the Liberace Fyffe UFO story, which was followed up by a BBC broadcast on the topic. In May of the same year, the RAF reported a banana-shaped UFO over London. In 2009, the play *Liberace: Live from Heaven* began at the Leicester Square Theatre in London. The UFO incident started in Fyffe, Alabama, but it was expanded and amplified through the British tabloid press.

IN SUMMATION

The Liberace UFO appearance, at first, seems absolutely absurd, but if one breaks down each individual detail, then it appears possibly more plausible. Some famous people seem larger than life, including figures such as JFK, Elvis and Liberace – hence the 12-foot-tall Liberace apparition. And it is hard to believe that certain beloved celebrities have passed away, so consequently people repeatedly see Liberace returning to Earth. Does it feel better to believe that aliens have abducted him, rather than knowing for sure that he is dead?



And in troubling times people see visions of exactly who and what they need to see. The Space Liberace archetype has become familiar to us, as he appears on the pages of comic books, as well as on television and the silver screen. Three songs have been written on the theme of extraterrestrial Liberace. And Mr Showmanship is known for his out-of-this-world costumes; that's why while flying his UFO, he just has to wear something fabulous. On stage, Liberace would often use a theatrical stunt to fly around by way of a harness (concealed under his costume) attached to high-tension wire, so the image of him flying (or floating) has already been established.

There have been many documented reports of UFOs in crescent or boomerang shapes as well as V-shaped experimental airships (like the Ascender 36); and these, when viewed at certain angles, could appear essentially banana-shaped. Metaphorically, Liberace's banana spaceship can be seen as an enormous Freudian phallus, while conversely the town's name "Fyffe" is unmistakably synonymous with Fyffes trademark bananas. In his magnificent mansion, Liberace loved to pose for

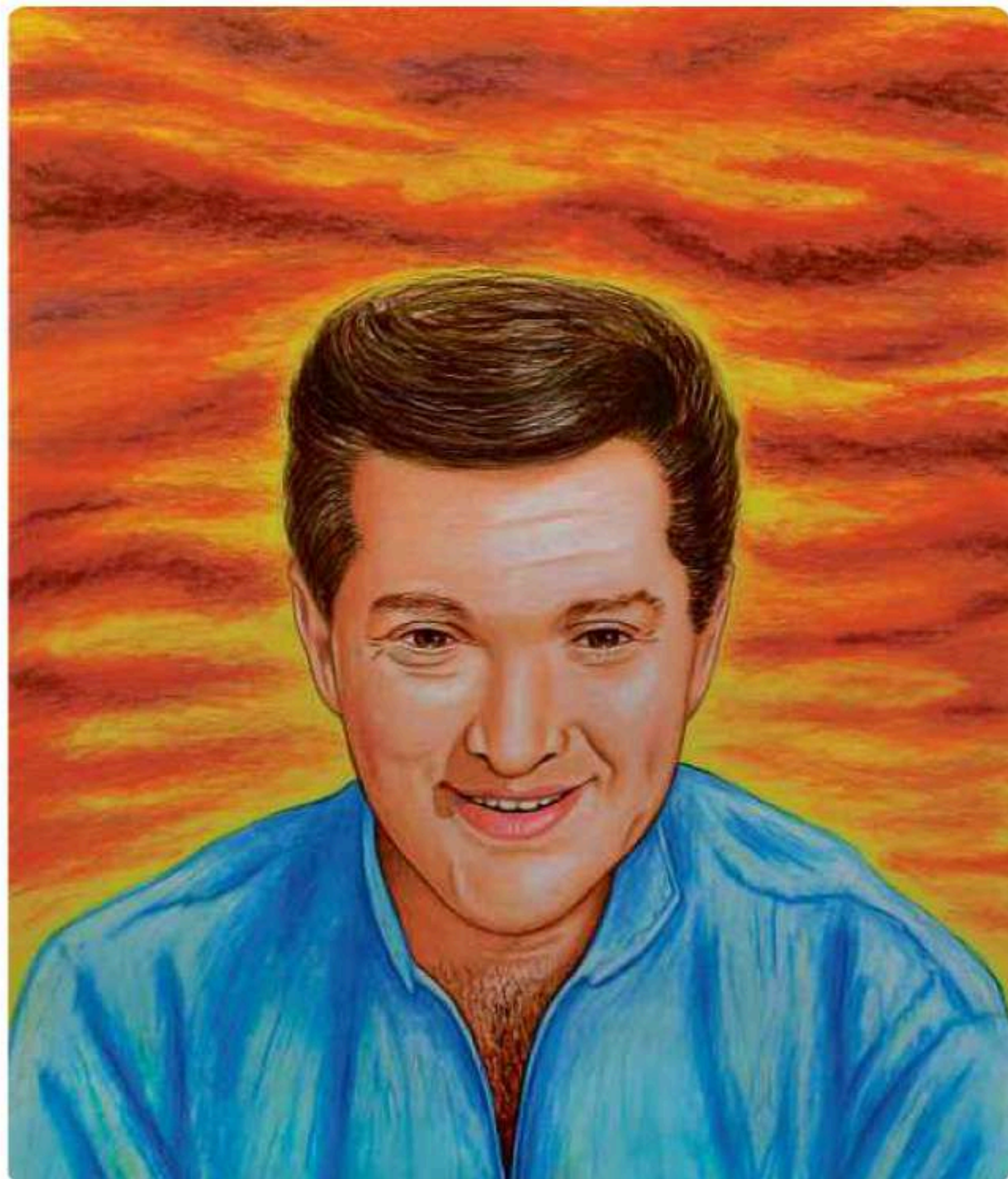
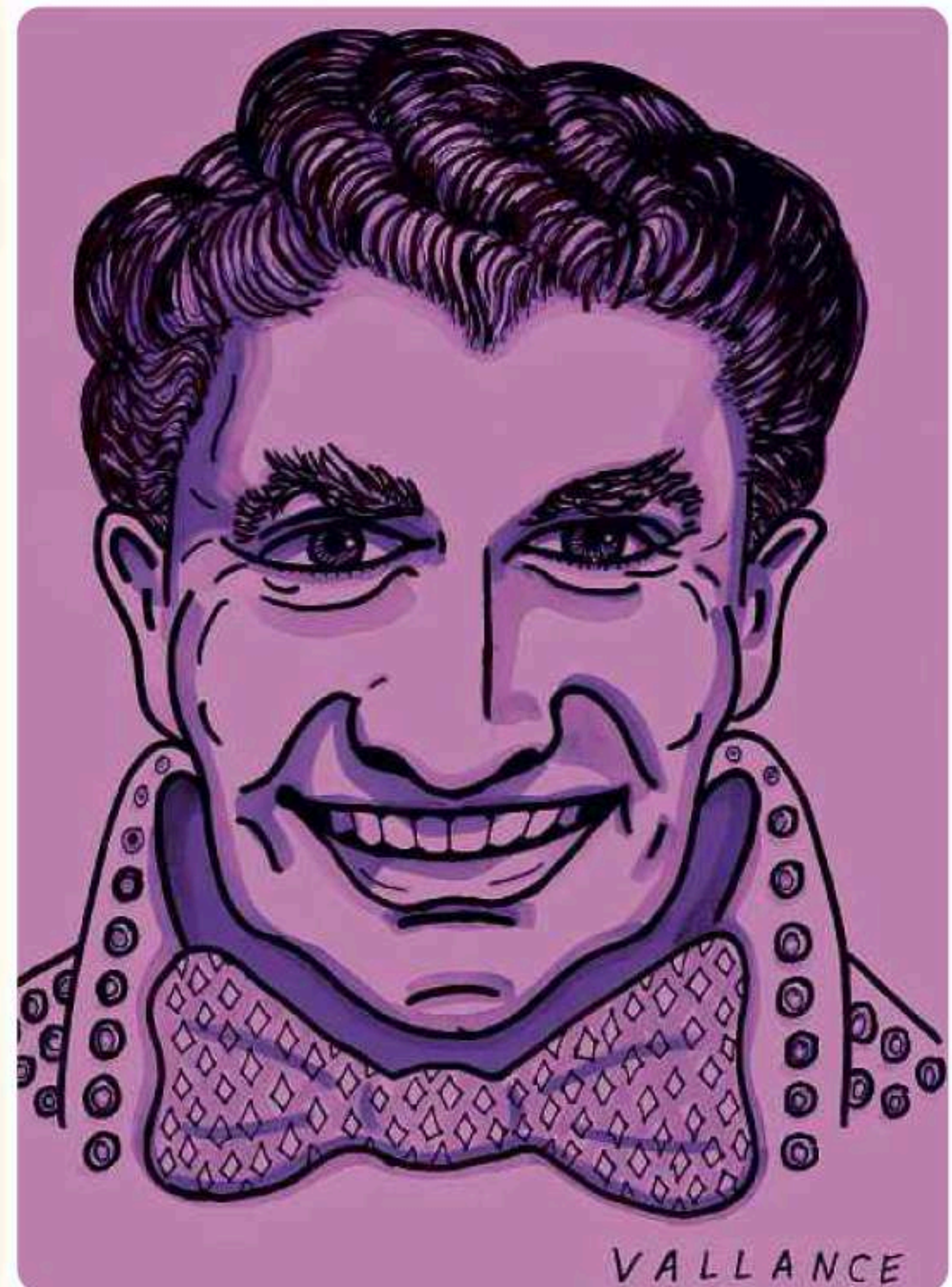
photos on his grand staircase – correspondingly, flying saucers have been reported with retractable access ramps, so in this manner the space-entertainer disembarks his spacecraft via a moving stairway. And what would Space Liberace do once he exited the craft? Of course, he would entertain onlookers with a marvellously camp medley of Hollywood showstoppers. Similar to *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, Space Liberace has glowing fingers – while on the other hand, ravers at dance parties wear (commercially available) gloves with glowing LED fingertips. Space Liberace plays a floating piano; then again keyboardist Keith Emerson (of Emerson Lake & Palmer) played a flying piano on stage at Madison Square Garden. It is said that Space Liberace appeared not in-the-flesh, but took the form of an "apparition", a ghostlike figure, phantom, vision, or spectre – like someone you see or think you see but who is not really there. It is well documented that hundreds of townsfolk in Fyffe reported seeing UFOs, which caused a great deal of chaos when thousands of sight-seers jammed the streets of the small town. In the *Daily Star*, the "UFO expert" (who still remains unidentified – surely not Jenny Randles) was quoted: "Too many people have seen strange things for it to be a hoax". Taken individually, every facet reported in the *Daily Star* is hypothetically possible. The only question is: "Do you want to believe in Space Liberace?"

For more, visit *The Liberace UFO Experience*: www.facebook.com/groups/970702203406344

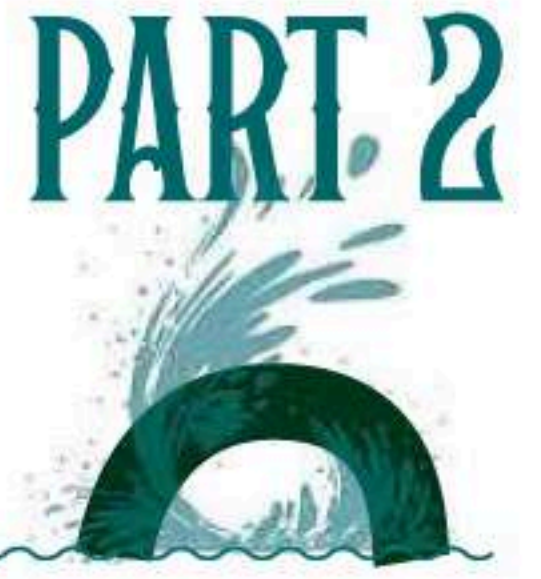
♦♦ JEFFREY VALLANCE is an artist, writer, curator, explorer and paranormal experimenter. He has published over 10 books, including *Blinky the Friendly Hen*, *Relics and Reliquaries* and *The Vallance Bible*. He is currently working on a new anthology, *Selected Spiritual Writings*.

Vallance does *Liberace*

Artist Jeffrey Vallance has long been bananas about Liberace – here we present a small gallery of his work inspired by the flamboyant entertainer



IN THE WAKE OF MORAG



In the concluding extract from his memoir, Australian cryptozoologist **TONY HEALY** looks back to the summer of 1979, when he spent four months on a Scottish lake monster safari. This time, he meets the Hermit of Loch Morar and has a possible close encounter with Morag...

In the summer of 1979, Morag wasn't the only strange and elusive entity in the vicinity of Loch Morar: two LN&MP (Loch Ness and Morar Project) members told of encountering a mysterious American who claimed to be living in a cave on the northern shore. He was, they said, a tall, Nordic type, with unkempt blonde hair and slightly wild blue eyes – “sort of like a Mormon missionary gone feral.” Before melting into the landscape, he'd said he intended to stay at the loch until he scored a clear picture of Morag.

THE HERMIT

The fellow proved almost as difficult to find as Morag herself, but one day, as I explored a rocky, bracken-covered ridge, I stumbled upon his camp. Beneath a large, flat-topped boulder, a tiny natural cave had been slightly enlarged by rough stone-work. A small peat fire smouldered near the narrow entrance. The little dwelling would have been homely enough had it not been for several evil-looking, bleached sheep skulls leering down from atop tall stakes beside the entrance. Wishing I'd brought along some holy water, garlic, or a silver crucifix, I stepped forward hesitantly, then jumped slightly as a tousled blonde head poked enquiringly out of the entrance.

The American was, if anything, even more startled than I was. In the 10 weeks he'd been at Morar, not one other person had found his cave. For a hermit, though, he was pretty friendly – particularly after he realised I was a fellow monster enthusiast.

As he brewed some coffee, he introduced himself as Todd Martin, a 22-year-old native of Lincoln, Nebraska. The sheep skulls, he explained, were intended to scare off any crofter's children who might stumble on his camp while he was away. He had been obsessed with Morag since a visit to Scotland in 1977. In August of that year, while hiking through the area, he'd camped for a night on a small peninsula on Morar's northern shore. At 8:24 that evening, as he sat outside his tent, he'd seen a disturbed patch of water moving around the point and into Tarbet Bay. “There was no wake, but I could see that something big was lifting the water. It was as if a porpoise or shark was just under the surface, but there was no fin or any part of a body visible. I now know there's a ridge of rock just there. Apparently, the animal had to come close to the



LEFT: Tony Healy at Loch Morar, 1979.

“WHATEVER THESE BLOODY THINGS ARE, THEY KNOW HOW TO HOLD THEIR BREATH!”

surface to get over it.”

The disturbance covered a distance of about 200ft (60m) at something like a fast walking pace and came tantalisingly close to Todd's vantage point, so close that he could have dived off the rocks and grabbed whatever it was – “If I'd been feeling suicidal.”

For the next two years, back in Nebraska, he worked long and hard, saving for a return visit to Morar. “I figured that since I'd had my first brush with Morag after only a couple of hours, then I'd surely get a photo of it if I stayed a month or two. So now,” he laughed, “I've been here for 10 weeks, watching all day, every day – and I haven't seen a bloody thing! Sometimes it gets so frustrating that I climb up on a rock and just yell my head off!”

Todd's cave, perched hundreds of feet above the water, boasted an absolutely unrivalled view of the loch. Indicating that vast sweep of water – several square miles of it visible at a single glance – he shook his head ruefully. “Whatever these bloody things are,” he laughed, “they sure know how to hold their breath!”

I took an immediate liking to the young adventurer. Although obsessed with the Morar mystery, he could still see the funny side of it. Like me, he was monster hunting for the hell of it; he was doing all he could to nail the elusive Morag, but it wouldn't kill him if he failed. It was just as well he had a sense of humour, because the trial and tribulations of rough camping at Morar would have tried the patience of a saint. In the 10 weeks he'd been there he'd enjoyed only 10 sunny days. Water had oozed into his cave so often that he'd been forced to dig a gutter across the floor; his clothes were always damp and his equipment covered with mould. “I've killed about two dozen mice in here too,” he grinned, “but the only time I came close to freaking out was when I found four enormous slugs inside my sleeping bag!”

After we finished our coffee, he showed me around his rocky domain. From a nearby hill-top, it was possible to see the entire western half of the loch with all its islands and bays. Only a few hundred yards beyond the western end was the coast, and way beyond that, their looming peaks wreathed in mist, were the islands of Rum and Eigg. As well as watching from his eyrie, the intrepid American often drifted around the loch at night in a tiny rowboat, clutching a camera equipped with a massively powerful flash.

After our first meeting I often dropped in at Todd's place to swap stories and do a bit of surface watching. In early August, for a change of scenery, we spent a few days under canvas at South Tarbet Bay – where he'd seen the disturbance, exactly two years earlier.

In the summer of 1979, fisherman who knew Morar well were complaining about the scarcity of fish in the loch. Salmon, particularly, were extremely rare, mainly because of netting out to sea. Some LN&MP members fretted that the monsters might die of starvation before they could be proven to exist. Under the circumstances, Todd and I thought a little judicious baiting of the loch might be a good idea, so we obtained 10 gallons of fish blood and guts from a cannery at Mallaig, toted it laboriously to Tarbet Bay, and poured it into the water. The cannery foreman had also given us a large salmon, which, although a little too ripe for human consumption, might appeal to a peckish plesiosaur.

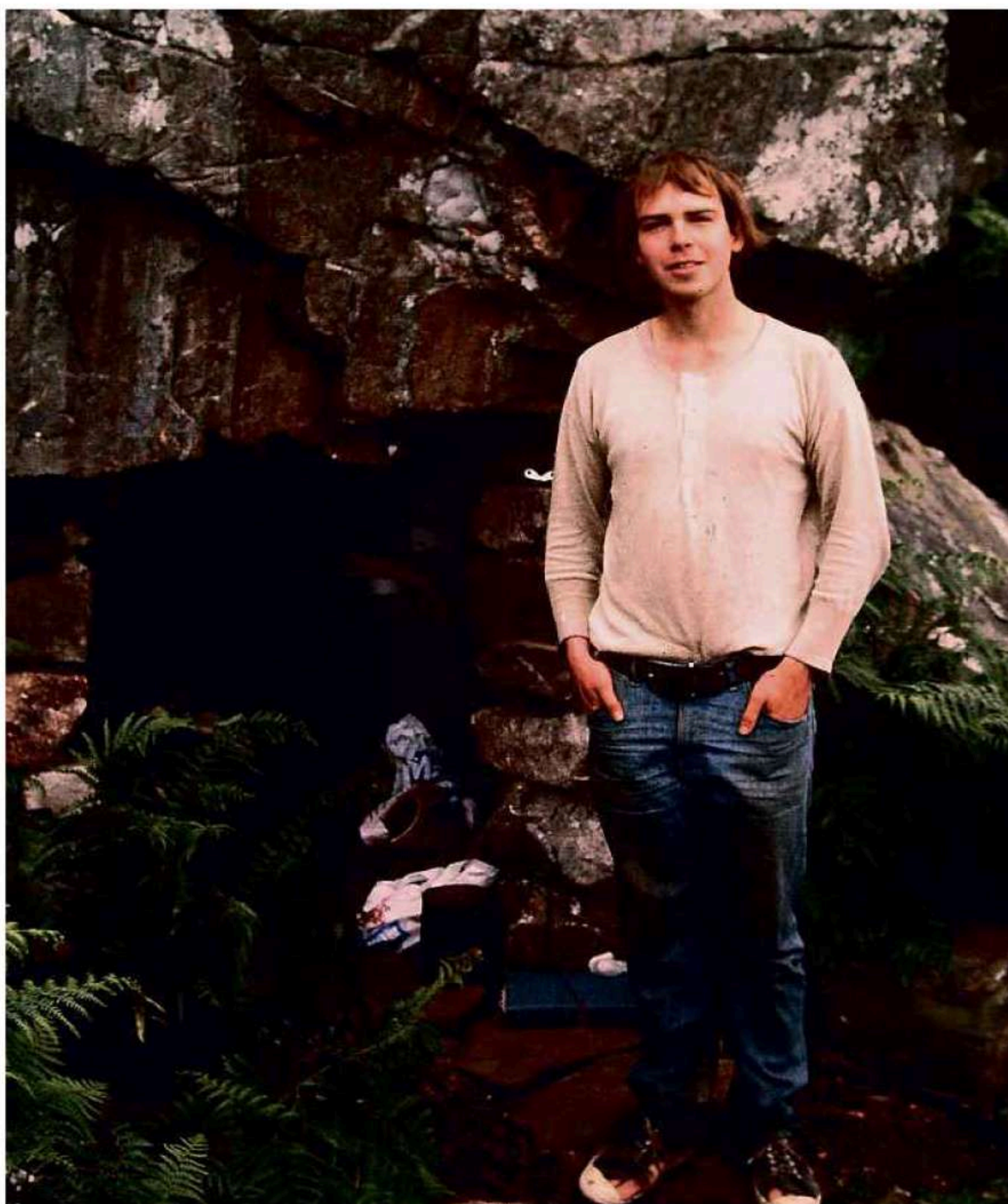


ABOVE: A view across Loch Morar. **BELOW:** Todd Martin, the Hermit of Loch Morar, outside his cave.

As a huge, yellow Moon rose over the loch on the night of 14 August, we sat in Todd's tiny boat and sowed Tarbet Bay and the surrounding water with large, gory chunks of salmon. The loch was so smooth, and the Moon so bright, that as I dropped them overboard the large red and silver portions remained visible for many feet as they tumbled through the clear, still water.

It was the perfect night for a monstrous encounter, and, as we moved slowly out of to the middle of the loch, I couldn't rid my mind of Tim Dinsdale's favourite Morag story. According to one of his informants, one dark night some years earlier, on this same stretch of water, three fishermen were nearly drowned when a huge creature rocketed up from below, smashing into the hull of their boat and throwing them high into the air. The terrified trio barely managed the long swim, through icy waters, to shore. Although Tim had made discreet approaches, he had not, as of 1979, managed to interview the men, who, being local gentry, were shy of publicity.

That creepy story played havoc with my peace of mind as Todd and I drifted across the vast, mirror-calm belly of the loch. To make matters worse, we strove to further freak each other out by relating ghost stories of our homelands and by discussing the local spooks. We spoke of the spectral, headless woman who supposedly terrorised people at the western end of the loch, and, as we drew closer to the southern shore, we recalled the legend of the dreaded Grey Dog of Meoble. That enormous, fiery-eyed demon hound was said to haunt the woods between Arisaig and Morar. That southern side of the loch has produced two other very creepy stories. In the shallows close to Meoble, quite a long stretch of the lakebed



TONY HEALY



LEFT: Todd Martin at his camp: "Sort of like a Mormon missionary gone feral."

is carpeted by clean white sand. While fishing there on 8 July 1969, Bob Duff, of Edinburgh, received a very nasty shock. As he peered idly over the side of his boat his eyes suddenly came to rest on a "monster lizard" lying on the bottom, 16ft (5m) below.¹

Another story that really gave me the creeps had been related, with great relish, by Adrian Shine. That tale, which the LN&MP has never been able to verify and must therefore be considered apocryphal, features the "Meoble Chauffer". That unfortunate fellow, while visiting the lodge with his wealthy employers during the 1920s, is said to have rashly swum alone, above Meoble's white sands. As friends looked on in horror, he suddenly disappeared beneath the water, then surfaced briefly, waving desperately and screaming, as he was dragged down for the last time: "It has me by the foot!"

After four hours of drifting in Todd's tiny boat, listening to such spooky tales, I was more than a little relieved when we returned to shore at about 4am.

WAKEY WAKEY! THE LOCH'S GONE ALL SHAKY!

Late the next morning, while lurching around collecting firewood, we decided that after breakfast we'd row across to Meoble to re-search the chauffer incident. As it promised to be a long, wet journey, I removed the valuable telephoto lens from my camera and stashed it in the back of the tent, then zipped the camera and 55mm standard lens into a padded, waterproof shoulder bag. Any well-read monster buff can predict what happened next: as soon as the camera was tucked away, I saw something worth photographing.

As a monster encounter – if that's what it was – this incident was small potatoes, but as it may have been my only personal brush with Morag, I'd better make the most of it.

This is how I remember the sequence of events: I was standing at water level, almost at the apex of vee-shaped Tarbet Bay, when I suddenly became aware of an odd looking, roughly oval area of disturbed water about

I SNAPPED AWAY, DESPERATELY HOPING TO SEE PART OF THE MONSTER'S BACK

100 yards to my left and within 10 yards of the shore. The well-defined, strangely vibrating patch appeared to be about 6ft (1.8m) wide and roughly 7ft (2m) long, and the uplifted, choppy water within it stood out clearly in the otherwise only slightly rippled bay.

As I did an incredulous double-take, the patch began to creep slowly away from shore. Grappling for an explanation, I thought at first that the disturbance might have been caused by a school of very twitchy fish, but as it accelerated to a fast walking pace and became increasingly turbulent, I scrambled frantically for the camera. Whatever it was, it was worth photographing. Tearing at the (inevitably) jammed zipper on the camera bag, I turned to call Todd who was on the hill behind the camp. Finally freeing the Nikon, I took several photos through the 55mm lens as the patch of turbulence moved about 25 to 30 yards in a southerly or south-westerly direction.

As I snapped away, I squinted frantically through the lens, desperately hoping to see at least part of the monster's back. Once, briefly, I almost convinced myself I'd glimpsed one or two small, dark humps, but those 'humps' were almost certainly just small, dark waves amid the confusion of shining water. The disturbance suddenly subsided just as Todd came running downhill, and, as I fitted my telephoto lens, I excitedly described it to him. As he unlimbered his Canon AE 1, the disturbance boiled up again, just a little further out. It remained stationary for a moment and then took off at a greater speed than before. Looking like the propwash of a small, invisible

powerboat, it left a short white wake, covered about 15 yards in a very short time, and suddenly subsided as before. The disturbance "surfaced", accelerated and submerged twice more, each time seemingly more intense. As Todd and I fired away madly with our cameras, we felt sure that a monster was right on the point of breaking the surface. "Come up, you bastard!" we yelled.

When the whatever-it-was made its last appearance, it seemed to be about 400 yards out, just beyond the tip of the peninsula. At that time, the turbulence was so strong that white water was being kicked up at least a foot high, over a rather large area. The disturbance was headed in a westerly direction towards Swordlands Bay, but, when we sprinted out to the end of the grassy peninsula, we saw only the huge, empty face of the loch.

Retreating back to camp, we sat down and tried to assess our experience objectively. As it had moved almost directly into a slight south-westerly breeze, the disturbance could hardly have been caused by wind action, nor did we think it was caused by a school of fish. Fish, we imagined, would have had to visibly break the surface to cause comparable turbulence.

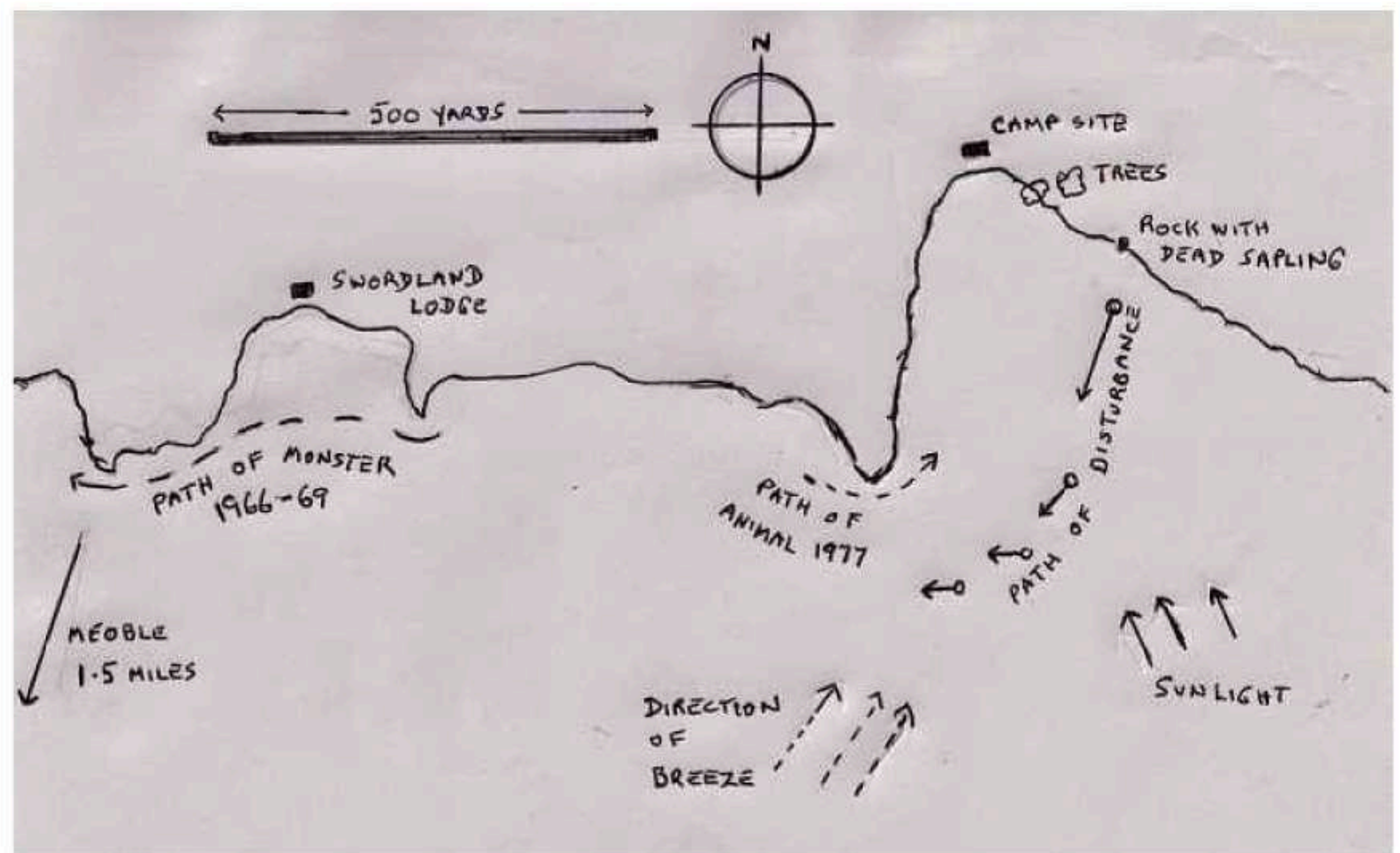
When first noticed, the disturbance was very close to shore, in what we thought was quite shallow water. Later, however, when we rowed over it, we found that the water in that spot was actually about 20ft (6m) deep – deep enough to conceal your average lake monster.

Although we couldn't be certain, there were a few good reasons to hope we'd had a close encounter with Morag. As mentioned earlier, the immediate area had "form" – Todd had watched a large animal, barely submerged, move around the point, into the same small bay, in 1977. Also, on many occasions between 1966 and 1969, another large, barely-submerged creature had repeatedly entered another small bay, overlooked by an isolated lodge called Swordland, just 500 yards to the west.

The eyewitnesses were a retired naval officer, Captain JS Metcalf, DSC, and his wife Dora, who occupied the lodge from 1962 to 1969. Captain Metcalf had served with distinction throughout both world wars. Dora was a pioneer in the field of IT, founding and running a business that was eventually taken over by International Computers Limited.

For the first four years the keen naturalists saw nothing strange in the loch, but between 1966 and 1969 they experienced repeated sightings of "three patches of light-coloured water" that moved, in a smooth, gliding manner, around the peninsula into Swordlands Bay from the direction of Tarbet Bay. They were about 300 yards from shore, clearly visible from the elevated vantage point of the lodge. They were seen mainly in early spring, usually in the forenoon.

Captain Metcalf told Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell that the yellowish-grey patches



TONY HEALY

ABOVE LEFT: Captain JS Metcalf as a young officer, c. 1921. ABOVE RIGHT: A map showing monster movements in Swordlands Bay and Tarbet Bay, 1966-1977.

“were oval in shape, the first or leading patch was about 12ft (3.6m) long by 6ft (1.8m) across the middle, the size of a dinghy, the second or middle patch was about 7ft (2m) long by 4ft (1.2m) wide, and the third patch was about 4ft (1.2m) long by 3ft (90cm) wide. The distance of dark water between the first and second patch was about 9ft (2.7m) and the same distance between the second and third patches.” The patches were “always in precisely the same formation,” and moved as one connected object, so the Metcalfs felt sure there was a large, probably multi-humped animal, swimming just below the surface. The creature always followed the same course, moving so slowly – “approximately two to three knots” – that they were able to estimate its overall length at about 40ft (12m). It usually remained in sight for about a quarter of an hour.

It appeared “fairly frequently... perhaps twice in one week and then not for a month. On the first few sightings we called to each other and examined the patches with the binoculars, but later on one would just call, ‘There’s the monster again’ and not bother any further, as it never broke surface and there was nothing new to see. [The patches] always came into sight close to the point on the east side of the bay and moved slowly along the edge of the deep water (in about 30ft (9m) depth of water) to the rocks and shoals near the west point of the bay, where the creature usually paused for a few minutes as though feeding, and then moved out of sight round the western point.”²

There was another reason for suspecting that Morag had favoured Todd and me with a brief visit at Tarbet Bay: eight years earlier, a similar patch of disturbed water was observed

from the jetty at Meoble, almost directly across the loch. I’d heard the story at first hand, shortly after my arrival in the area.

THE MEOBLE BOATMAN

By the time of his sighting, Sween MacDonald had worked as the Meoble boatman for 18 years, so, as Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell observed, “his knowledge of normal conditions and occurrences on the loch [was] probably unrivalled [making him] the nearest thing to an ideal witness that anyone could desire.”³

Although two other sightings had been reported from Meoble Bay in July 1969, Mr MacDonald had remained sceptical of Morag’s existence. However, at 4pm on Sunday, 8 August 1971, as he was standing outside the Meoble boathouse, he noticed a small patch of water that was “shaking and trembling” on the otherwise “flat glass calm” surface just 30 yards from the jetty. Then, to his surprise, the disturbance became more intense and took off at great speed, perhaps 10 or 12 knots, leaving a white wash, zig-zagging for a couple of hundred yards across the bay before disappearing. Mr MacDonald told me that whatever made the disturbance was much bigger and faster than the salmon and other fish with which he was so familiar. It moved so fast, in fact, that a distinct “whooshing” sound was audible in the still air. Although the creature didn’t fully surface, the shape of the wash suggested that at least a small part of its back was protruding out of the water. As readers may have noticed, two details mentioned by Mr MacDonald are very similar to what Todd and I saw: the way that, when first noticed, the disturbed patch appeared to be “shaking and trembling”, and the “white wake” that the semi-submerged creature created as it sped away.

For all of the above reasons, Todd and I concluded that what we’d photographed probably was Morag’s wake. Not surprisingly, however, that phrase so familiar to monster hunters – “if only” – occurred frequently in our post-sighting conversation: “If only the bloody



TONY HEALY

ABOVE: Todd in his “tiny boat”, the setting for monster sightings and spooky tales.

thing had surfaced... if only we'd been up on the headland looking down on the bay... etc, etc." By and large, though, we were fairly pleased with the incident. At least we hadn't panicked, and at least we had a few photos to back our story.

After the long hike back to White Beach and a much-needed shower in Mallaig, I decided to return to Ness to catch up on the latest frolics of Morag's big sister. Leaving the sheep skulls to guard his cave, Todd took a few days break from Morar and accompanied me.

THE "WORLD PREMIERE"

On arriving at the larger loch, Todd and I found that our possible Morag encounter had been well and truly eclipsed by several very interesting Nessie reports. When we caught up with him on the Fort Augustus jetty, Tim Dinsdale told us there had been two reports of single humps in Urquhart Bay, plus the sighting, by a professional man from Glasgow, of a large, single hump preceded by a long head and neck that was moving up the loch, away from Fort Augustus, clearly silhouetted against the sheen on the water. Later that night, the same man heard a large animal rushing through the water very close to his Borlum Bay campsite. It seemed to cruise around for a while, then race back out of the bay. As it passed, the man could plainly hear not only its large bow-wave breaking on shore, but also the rhythmic strokes of what he assumed were the beast's powerful flippers.

Tim had good reason to believe the man's story, because at the same time, on the same night, he'd felt *Water Horse* pitch and roll as a large wake suddenly disturbed the previously tranquil loch.

Interesting stories indeed, but another – even though it may well have been a hoax – was even more exciting. That incident supposedly occurred in the dead of night in early August, and involved two salmon poachers, one of whom reported it to the *Edinburgh Sunday Post*. According to the anonymous correspondent, as his mate stood on shore holding one end of their long net, he, clad in a wetsuit, swam out with the other end of it, intending to bring it around in an arc. All went well until something a lot larger than any salmon ploughed into the trap. As it dragged him along with the net, the freaked-out felon supposedly came in physical contact with the beast's rough, warty hide! ⁴

Compared to that ripping yarn, the story of our own possible wake sighting seemed dull indeed – but at least we could produce photographs for examination.

After my 35mm 400 ASA film was developed in Inverness, I nervously projected the resulting slides as a "world premiere" at Dick Raynor's Drumnadrochit cottage. When the first few images – the ones taken with the standard 55mm lens – were flashed onto the screen, I was dismayed to see that the disturbance, that I'd thought to be less than 100 yards away when it first appeared, now appeared to be at least twice that distance from the camera. The pictures showed only a short white line gradually lengthening and drawing



LEFT: One of the author's photos of the "flapping" disturbance on the loch – was this the wake of Morag?

away from shore. The shots taken through my 400mm telephoto lens, however, gave a better idea of what Todd and I had seen: a patch of turbulence repeatedly surging up, moving off in a south-westerly direction trailing a short wake, and then submerging.

As the photos didn't reveal any part of a body, they were almost worthless as evidence, but Tim cheered me considerably by declaring what they showed was unquestionably "a major disturbance". Probably no one in Britain was more qualified than Tim to judge pictures of that sort. He'd spent hundreds of days and nights afloat on Ness and Morar, plus more than a decade of shore-based work, and was also a world-class photographer. Later, when Todd's wake photos were developed, we found that they matched mine nicely, although, as he'd had less time to switch lenses, only one was taken through a long lens.

After viewing my pictures at her house overlooking Urquhart Bay, Winifred Cary said she'd seen several similar patches of "flapping" water.

"Could such 'flapping' have been caused by the monsters?" I enquired hopefully.

"Most definitely," she replied. "Once or twice, I've seen the creatures rise straight out of such disturbed areas. On other occasions you just see the area of 'flapping' water moving across the bay – nothing surfaces, but you know one of the animals is right below it."

She reminded me that Ted Holiday had observed a similar phenomenon at monster-haunted Lough Fadda in Connemara, so I dug out my copy of *The Dragon and The Disc* and re-read his account of it: "... my attention was attracted to a patch of disturbed water about a half a mile distant... a little to the right of mid-lough and about 20 yards in diameter. Something just below the surface seemed to be trembling or vibrating. After about 10 minutes all activity ceased and the water became calm. Similar patches have been seen in Loch

Ness by various witnesses, myself included, and they have been followed by car as they moved along the lake." ⁵

So – was the disturbance that Todd and I witnessed at Tarbet Bay really Morag's frothy wake?

Ricky Gardiner, of The LN&MP's evidence subcommittee, didn't think so. After carefully examining the photographs some weeks later, he pointed out, correctly, that I appeared to have underestimated the distances involved, and concluded that the pictures "probably show an effect of the wind... very much exaggerated by the play of strong sunlight."

"However," he added graciously, "I agree that your account suggests something more profound."

Ricky's verdict was quite reasonable; Todd and I had never expected them to set the world of cryptozoology on fire in any case. But, given the strange "flapping" motion of the disturbance when it first appeared – so similar to what had been noticed prior to monster sightings at Loch Ness – and in light of what had occurred in neighbouring Swordlands Bay just 10 years earlier, I still like to think that, just maybe, Morag really did pay us a brief visit on that August day back in 1979.

NOTES

¹ Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell, *The Search for Morag*, p136.

² LN&MP Report, *Ibid.*, p136.

³ *Ibid.*, pp130-135..

⁴ *Edinburgh Sunday Post*, 12 Aug 1979..

⁵ *The Dragon and The Disc*, 1973, pp. 51-52.

❖ TONY HEALY is an Australian author and researcher who has investigated all kinds of high strangeness around the world. He is the co-author, with Paul Cropper, of *Out of the Shadows: Mystery Animals of Australia* (1994) and *The Yowie: In Search of Australia's Bigfoot* (2006).

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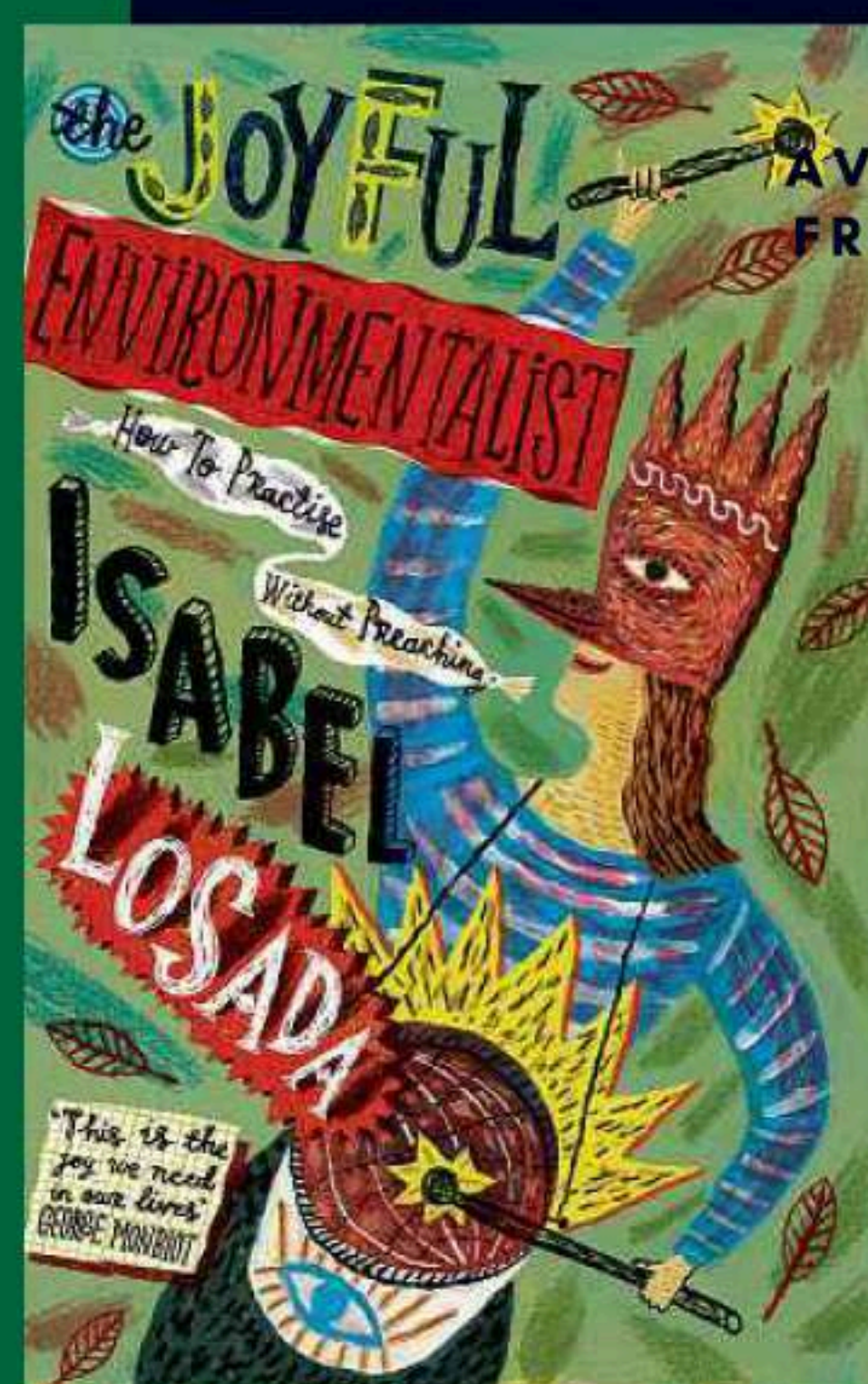
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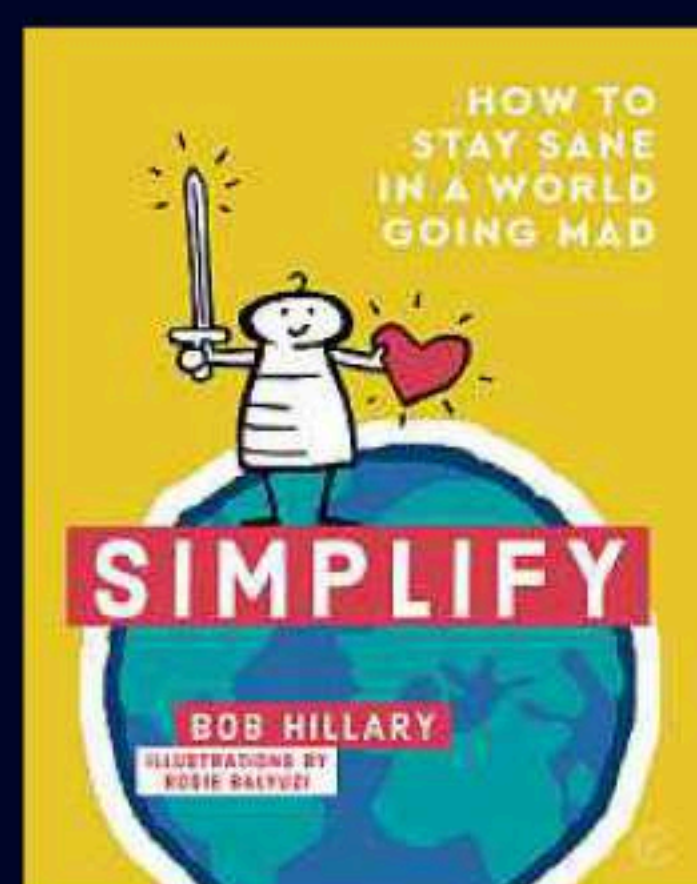
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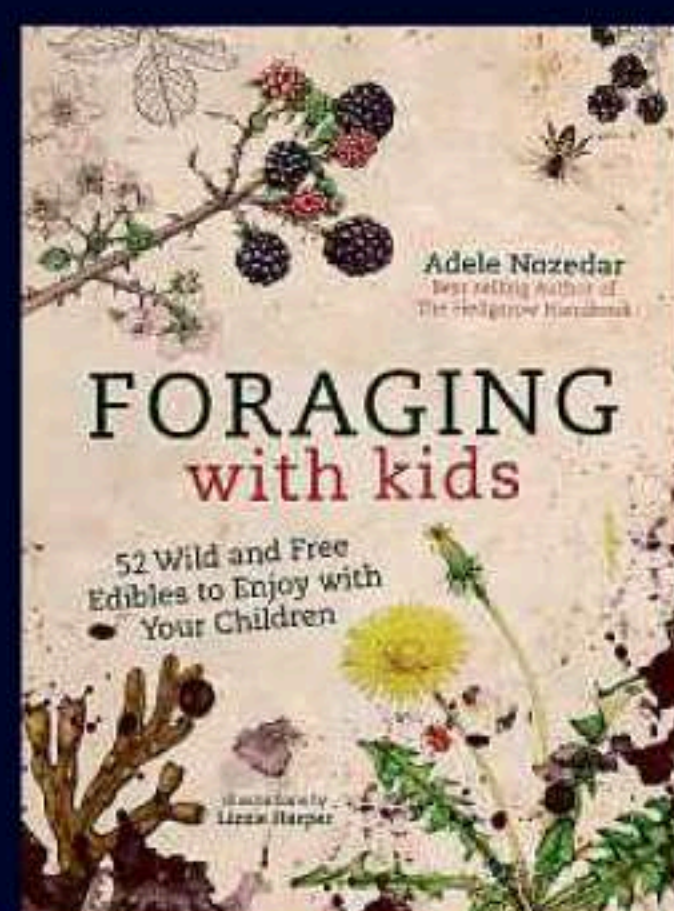
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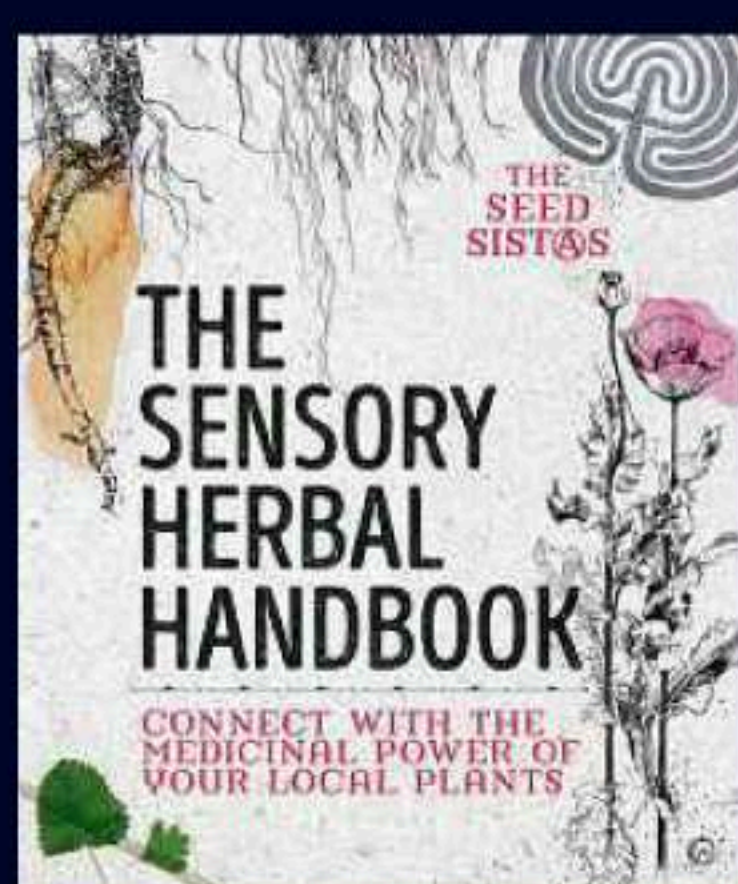
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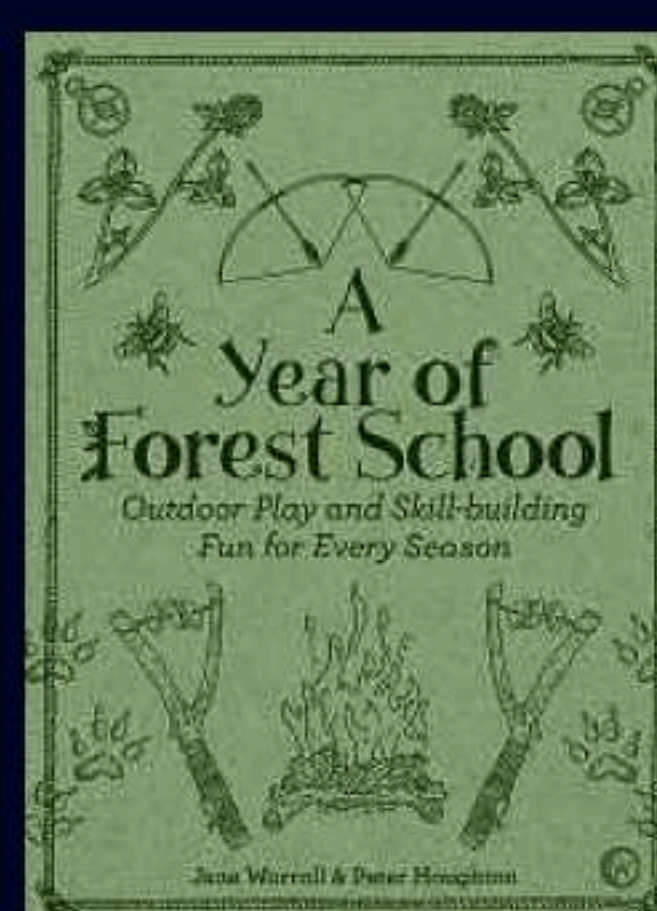
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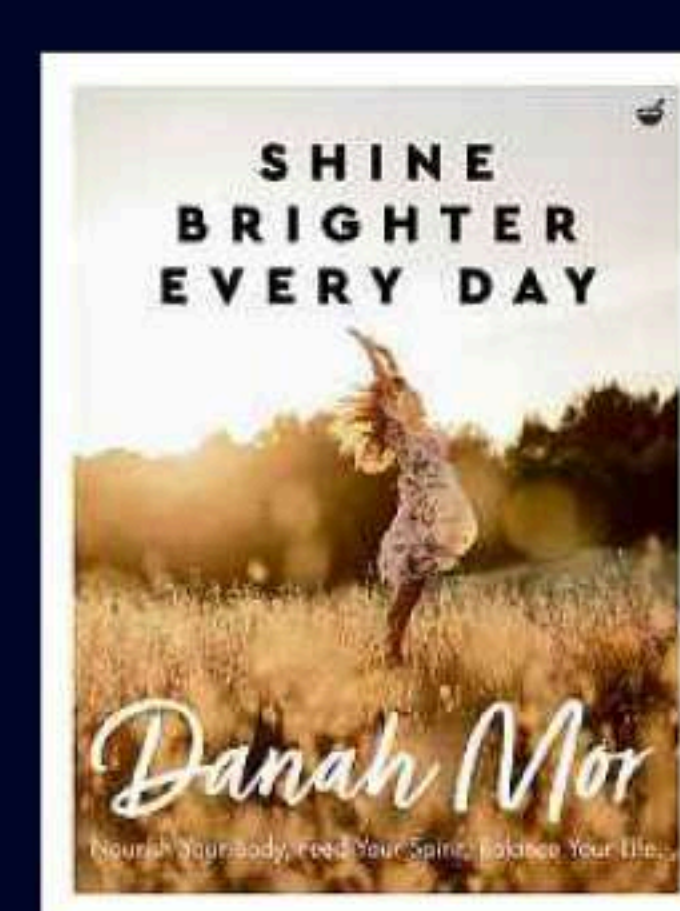
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BOLD DOVER

Pun intended, says **ROB GANDY**, as he tells the story of the first ever English ‘Olimpick’ Games and the 17th century English Catholic whose inclusive vision launched this unusual sporting festival.

The 2021 Olympic Games in Tokyo – if they go ahead as planned – are set to incorporate a number of new sports: karate, skateboarding, sport climbing, and surfing; with baseball/softball returning, given that Japan is baseball-mad.¹ This reflects the evolutionary nature of the Games, with new replacing old; as I noted when writing about our homegrown Wenlock Olympian Games (see **FT343:46-50**), it is a shame that the old women’s race for a pound of tea, horseback wrestling and a pig race no longer feature.

Yet just as the Wenlock Games were starting in 1850, the first ever English Games based on an Olympic model were coming to a sad end 60 miles (96km) away in the Cotswolds. These were known as “Robert Dover’s Olimpick Games” and began in 1612, 400 years before the London Olympics of 2012. But who was Robert Dover, and what sort of games took place? Most written information comes from the *Annalia Dubrensia*² (“Annals of Dover”), a celebratory anthology of poetry dedicated to Dover featuring contributions from more than 30 poets, including Ben Jonson and Thomas Heywood.

ROBERT DOVER’S ENGLAND

England in the late 16th and early 17th century experienced a period of relative peace under Queen Elizabeth I and her successor James I. Both monarchs were Protestants, and Catholicism had been largely suppressed or driven underground, although Puritanism was on the rise. There was considerable nostalgia for a ‘Merry England’ of bygone years, which was often reflected at traditional fairs, festivals, wakes and church ales (the equivalent of today’s money-raising fetes, but with beer instead of tea, these were notorious for drunken behaviour and sexual licence).

Robert Dover was a Catholic from a Norfolk family of ‘church papists’ – people who were Catholic at heart but conformed to the law and attended church, thereby avoid-



LEFT: A contemporary incarnation of Robert Dover appears at a modern revival of the Cotswold Olimpick Games.

FACING PAGE: The Games as seen in the 1636 *Annalia Dubrensia*. Dover is on horseback, a feather in his hat.

ered a good, honest and helpful lawyer – quite a rarity at the time. His clients included one Endymion Porter of Aston-sub-Edge, a servant of King James, who was enthusiastic about country games.

Gentry who could afford it would arrange various country entertainments, and so Dover soon decided to organise something which would be very different from previous small local Whitsun events, and arguably also celebrate ‘Merry England’. He was very likely supported by Baptist Hicks, a rich local cloth dealer who had financed a great deal of James I’s early reign.

The Games were carefully designed to avoid controversy, and involved not only shepherds and workers but also local gentry. Dover was a man who very much enjoyed pastimes and good company, and so for him the Games were recreational rather than competitive – he apparently described them as “this mirth, this jollity”.

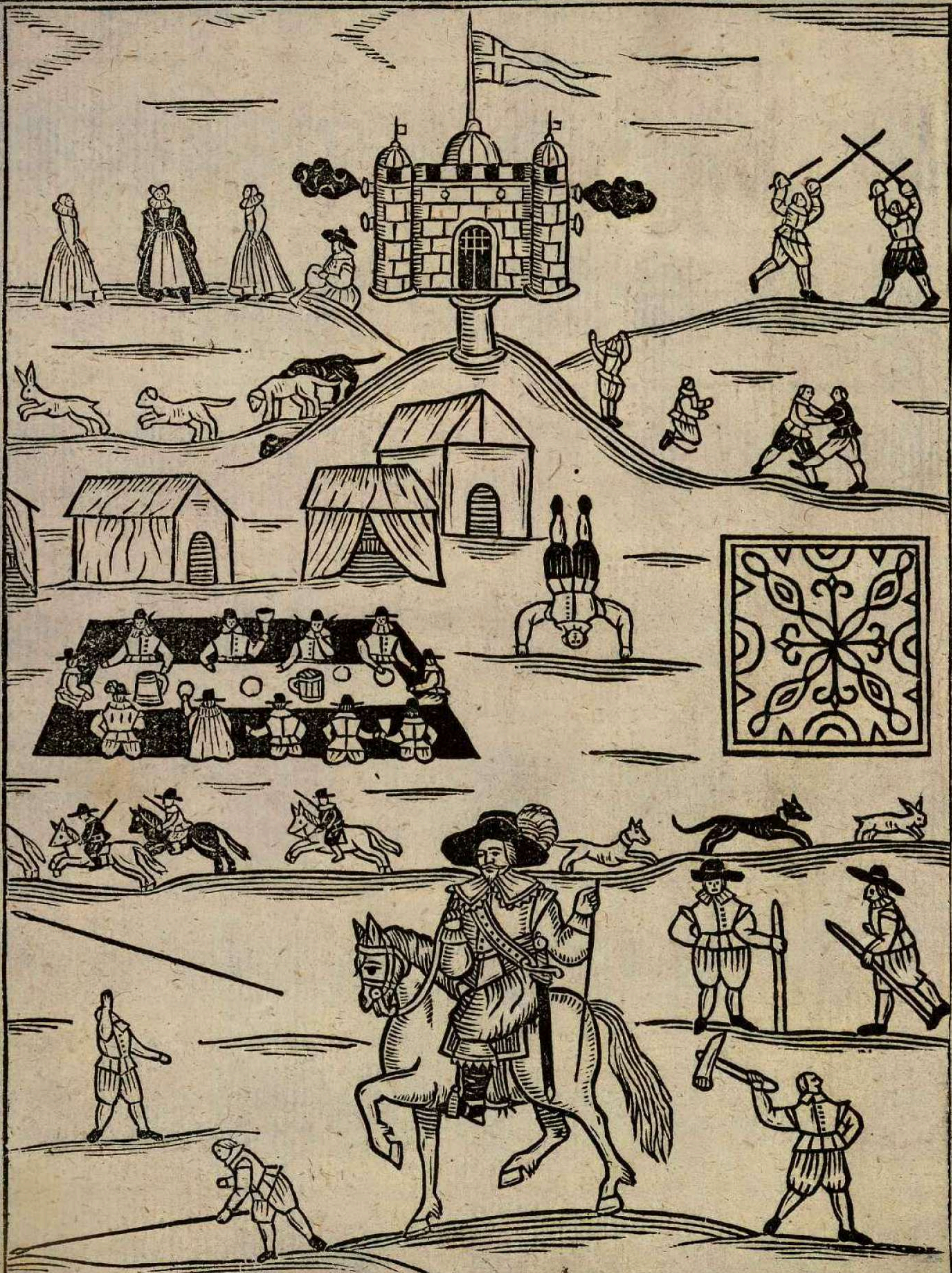
It is suspected that he asked for and received permission from King James before starting his festival (probably via Hicks and Porter), in full knowledge of what sporting activities would be approved by the King who, as James VI of Scotland, had written *Basilican Doron* (“The King’s Gift”) for his son and heir, Henry, offering advice on how to be an effective ruler. In it, he recommended the use of country games to promote good feeling among the common people towards their King, together with a list of sports that were suitable for his son.

The location for the Games was open land on an escarpment above the Vale of Evesham, in Weston-sub-Edge just outside Chipping Campden, then called Kingcombe Plain, which included a natural amphitheatre. While this might now seem a somewhat remote spot to choose, in 1612 there were good communications.

THE GAMES INVOLVED NOT ONLY SHEPHERDS AND WORKERS BUT ALSO LOCAL GENTRY

ing the heavy 12p fine for each absence. His parents ensured he received a Catholic education, and he studied law at Gray’s Inn, which was somewhat tolerant of Catholics. It was there that he probably became familiar with the Olympics and other ancient games. He settled in the Cotswolds in 1611, near to family members, where there was increasing local demand for lawyers. He was consid-

COTSWOLD GAMES.





ABOVE: Spectators watch the modern Games, which haven taken place on Dover's Hill near Chipping Campden in every pre-pandemic year since 1964.

PUTTING ON A SHOW

Convention set country activities in some ancient Greek landscape and contemporary poetry made popular the pastoral genre with its Arcadian shepherds. Dover used real shepherds and involved local gentry in his re-enactments of Greek games. The centrepiece was a portable wooden 'Dover Castle', which was dismantled after the Games and stored for the following year. This incorporated cannon that loudly fired blanks with real gunpowder, at a time when royal permission was needed for supplies of powder.³ The Games were not strictly reflective of the Greek Olympics (and were held annually rather than every four years), but by 1636 the term 'Olimpick' was fully accepted.

Dover maintained firm control over proceedings, ensuring the Games were peaceful and orderly, and therefore suitable for gentry. His position was signalled by his riding a horse while wearing the King's second-hand clothes, which included a hat, feather and ruff. This was not as bizarre as it might sound today. Wearing such clothes sent a powerful message, highlighting royal patronage. They were undoubtedly first given by the King to Porter, who then passed them to Dover, in part to encourage his enterprise. Clothing was valuable in the 17th century and not thrown away, regularly being left in people's wills. And the King had clothes to spare: one five-year period saw him buy 60 new cloaks, more than eight waistcoats, a new suit every 10 days, a new pair of stockings, boots and garters every four or five days and a new pair of gloves

WRESTLING EVOLVED INTO A VERY LOCALISED VERSION KNOWN AS SHIN KICKING

every day! What would he have done if there had been a Primark back then?

Importantly, clothes defined a person's occupation, religious beliefs and social status. It's worth noting that Dover's wearing a feather in his hat and a ruff raised the ire of Puritans, who believed that even such small acts could lead to sin and an eternity in Hell, as did holding the Games on the Whit-sun holiday. Puritans were viewed by many (correctly, as it turned out) as a sect whose beliefs challenged monarchical authority; dressing as he did, then, was a political statement by Dover.

Dover made sure that the Games were inclusive, and his belief that they functioned to bring rich and poor together and create social harmony was possibly why they caught the public's imagination. The feasting that took place ensured that the lower orders were fed too. In addition, Dover provided favours and prizes for event winners. These included silver awards for the gentry for certain sports, to be returned each year. Shepherds and workers are understood to have received money as prizes.

CLASS AND SPORT

The mores of 17th century England meant that being completely faithful to the Greek Olympics was not possible. In Greece, keeping fit and physically skilled was part of an educated man's lifestyle. By contrast, Christianity placed emphasis on the soul, although 17th century sports could act as legitimised preparation for war. Whereas Greeks were naked or in full armour during sports, the English competed wearing doublet and hose. The 'Olimpick' sports included athletic exercises, which maintained fitness, such as running, leaping, wrestling, and spurning the bar (similar to tossing the caber in Highland Games).

Backsword was a martial sport fought with a wooden sword and a dagger. Weapons were held high, with scores made when the head was hit and blood drawn – body blows did not count. Serious injury, such as losing an eye, was not unknown. Some sports that took place that were not on the King's approved list were headstands (which he dismissed as tumbling tricks for comedians and acrobats) and throwing the sledge or hammer. There is uncertainty about whether bare-fist fighting was included.

The likely original form of wrestling at the 'Olimpicks' was Cotswold Wrestling, similar to the Cornish and Cumberland versions, which involved gripping the opponent's shoulders and attempting to trip or throw him to the ground. This eventually evolved into a very localised version known as Shin Kicking (see below). The referees were known as sticklers, believed to have led to the phrase "a stickler for the rules".

The sports closest to the original Olympics involved local villagers, but Dover also needed activities to attract the gentry, and so he arranged for there to be horse racing, hunting, and coursing. Gentry could participate personally in races or involve their grooms or stable staff. The course on which the races were held has now vanished under ploughed fields, but records speak of a narrow course of two and a half miles, thereby necessitating a series of heats with limited numbers of horses in each. Hunting, which was deemed to encompass warlike skills, would have involved hounds. It is probable that the prey, such as a fox, would have been captured in advance and then released; similarly, coursing would have involved captured hares, because it would have been unrealistic to assume that such prey would simply be available on a hill full of spectators. The hares would have probably been released for the greyhounds and harriers inside an area of grass enclosed by fences (known as 'paddock hunting'). The aforementioned expensive silver prizes, which naturally encouraged the gentry, were a silver castle (for the owner of the winning horse) and a silver-studded collar for the winning greyhound.

Dancing took place for better-off onlookers, and to emphasise the event's Greek origins, Homer himself put in an appearance as a blind harpist and there was a 'Troy Town' turf maze, which could include some dancing along its paths. Other entertainments included tents for card games – which also had the King's approval – albeit played for low stakes.

DECLINE AND RESURRECTION

The original Games came to an end with the English Civil War, with many who participated, of all classes, suffering disease, and loss of life or property. Dover was 60 when



ABOVE: The first revival of the Games after their demise in 1862 was in 1951 as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations. The photo above shows a woman competing in a sheaf-throwing competition.

the war started and he probably stayed at home throughout. Unsurprisingly, he supported the King, with his son John being a captain of horse under Prince Rupert. He died in Barton-under-Heath at the age of 70, the year before Oliver Cromwell became Protector.

The 'Olimpicks' returned, along with other country celebrations, following the Restoration in 1660, although the exact date is unknown. But without Dover's controlling hand they deteriorated over time, with general riot on occasion, becoming

little better than drunken country festivals. The activities were of lesser status with, for example, a women's race for the prize of a smock, a donkey race, cock fighting, bowling and blind man's buff. RR Vyvyan wrote that from 1846 onwards, the Games, instead of being decorously conducted as originally intended, became "the trysting place of all the lowest scum of the population which lived in the districts lying between Birmingham and Oxford."

The enclosure of the common land on which the Games were held marked their

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The Rules of Shin Kicking

Competitors will be assigned bouts at random, with winners of all rounds gaining entry to a final bout. Usually, there will be a maximum of 12 contestants.

1. Equipment. Competitors must wear long trousers or tracksuits and may cushion their shins by using straw (provided). They will be provided with white coats, representing the traditional shepherd's smock. Footwear may be trainers, shoes, or soft-toed (i.e. un-reinforced) boots. Any form of metal-reinforced toe on footwear is expressly forbidden. This will now be checked both before and after bouts! Failure to comply will result in instant exclusion, and barring from future events!
2. Stance. A competitor begins by holding his or her opponent by the shoulders (or lapels) with arms straight.
3. The contest will be started, finished (if necessary) and judged, by an arbiter, known as a Stickler. The Stickler decides the fairness of a contest.
4. A contest is decided on the best of three throws: i.e. two successful throws results in a win. Note that this may be reduced to one throw in the event of poor weather, or the maximum number of competitors reached.

Source: www.olimpickgames.co.uk/the-events

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

end in 1862. Ironically, this was around the time that William Penny Brookes was starting the Wenlock Games. Kingcombe Plain was fenced, enclosed and split between farmers and landowners. Only the section of hill with the large slope remained as pasture and woodland, and it is this that kept Dover's name alive. When it was put up for sale for development in 1929, local artist Frederick Landseer Griggs outbid developers at auction, even though he could ill afford it. Subsequently, appeals raised funds for Dover's Hill to be bought off Griggs and given to the National Trust.⁴ The Games were revived in 1951, the year of the Festival of Britain, and took place on the hill. They featured 'equestrian sports', boxing, tug of war, donkey races and foot races, together with modern games such as pillow fights, the greasy pole, horseshoe throwing, coconut shies and bowling for a pig. But arguably the most popular survival was shin kicking. Robert Dover himself was commemorated by a local rider dressed in historical costume on a horse. Unfortunately, a foot-and-mouth outbreak in 1952 and Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation in 1953 stalled the reintroduction. The Games reappeared in 1964 as part of the Scuttlebrook Wake, a torchlight procession, featuring Robert Dover on horseback, from the hill into Chipping Campden. Since then, the 'Olimpicks' take place on the Friday evening of Whitsun week, with the Robert Dover's Games Society (formed in 1965) raising the necessary funds.

The Games have continued to evolve and have been augmented by gymkhana events, motorcycle displays and similar; with variations on a theme each year. The more bizarre include: dwile flonking,⁵ piano smashing, sack racing in huge sacks, parachute jumping, and morris dancing with a hobby horse. The Society has also created a mock castle in honour of Dover's original. The current Games are a continuation of the early rural sporting events, and are determined by the Society with the local population and participants in mind. They combine informal, amateur sporting events for competitors, the majority of whom register on the night of the Games, with general entertainment and activities for visitors. In true amateur spirit, all events are free to enter. However, it should be noted that no alcohol is sold on the hill during the event!

The 'Olimpicks' now mark the end of the festival season in Chipping Campden, which includes an International Music Festival



LEFT: An advertisement for the 1822 Games, which by then had become a debased and rowdy affair. BELOW: A poster for the 2018 games, featuring the then champion shin kicker.

in 2020 and 2021, will not return until next year at the earliest. It is interesting to note that it was not long after the return of the Games, with the Restoration of King Charles II, that England suffered the major pandemic of the Great Plague. Hopefully, the outcome of the current pandemic will not be as grim.

Robert Dover was a widely admired man whose benevolence and imagination made the Cotswold 'Olimpick' Games a renowned success. That he used the ancient Greek Olympics as inspiration to create an event which brought together all strata of society was exceptional, and it goes without saying that he must have been particularly canny in gaining royal support despite his own Catholic upbringing. Credit must go to the

good people of Chipping Campden and the surrounding area for their efforts in keeping Dover's 'Olimpick' flame burning while keeping true to his vision of "this mirth, this jollity".

SOURCES

The main sources for this article were: 'The First Ever English Olimpicks Games' by Celia Haddon (Hodder & Stoughton, 2004) and the Robert Dover's Cotswold Olimpicks Games website (www.olimpickgames.co.uk/). All quotes are from one of these sources unless otherwise stated.

NOTES

1 www.tvinsider.com/846314/tokyo-summer-olympics-2020-new-sports/

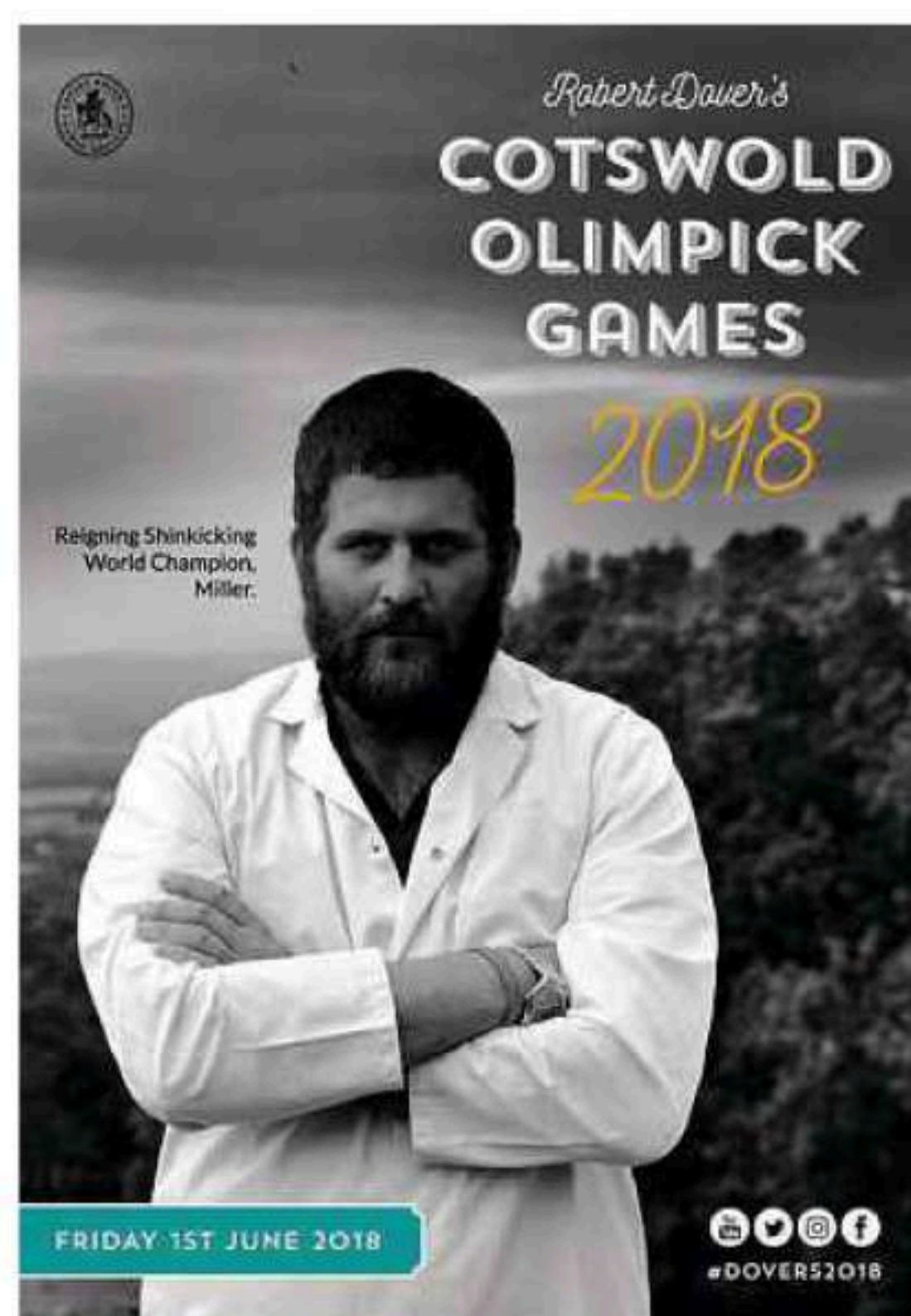
2 www.olimpickgames.co.uk/annalia-dubrensia

3 No doubt the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 aimed at blowing up James I while in the House of Lords influenced this state of affairs.

4 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dovers-hill

5 Dwile flonking is an East Anglian pub sport involving two teams of 12 players, each taking a turn to dance around the other while attempting to avoid a beer-soaked dwile (cloth) thrown by the non-dancing team. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwile_flonking

➡ ROB GANDY is a Visiting Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University and a regular contributor to FT. A lifelong forteran, he has eclectic interests in all things weird, including phantom hitchhikers, ghosts, strange sports and folk customs, time slips and synchronicities.



and a Literary Festival. The Scuttlebrook Wake takes place the following day; it is a street fair and procession with the crowning of the Scuttlebrook Queen, with fancy dress entrants and floats.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At the time of writing, the Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact sporting events across the world, and the Cotswold 'Olimpick' Games, having been cancelled

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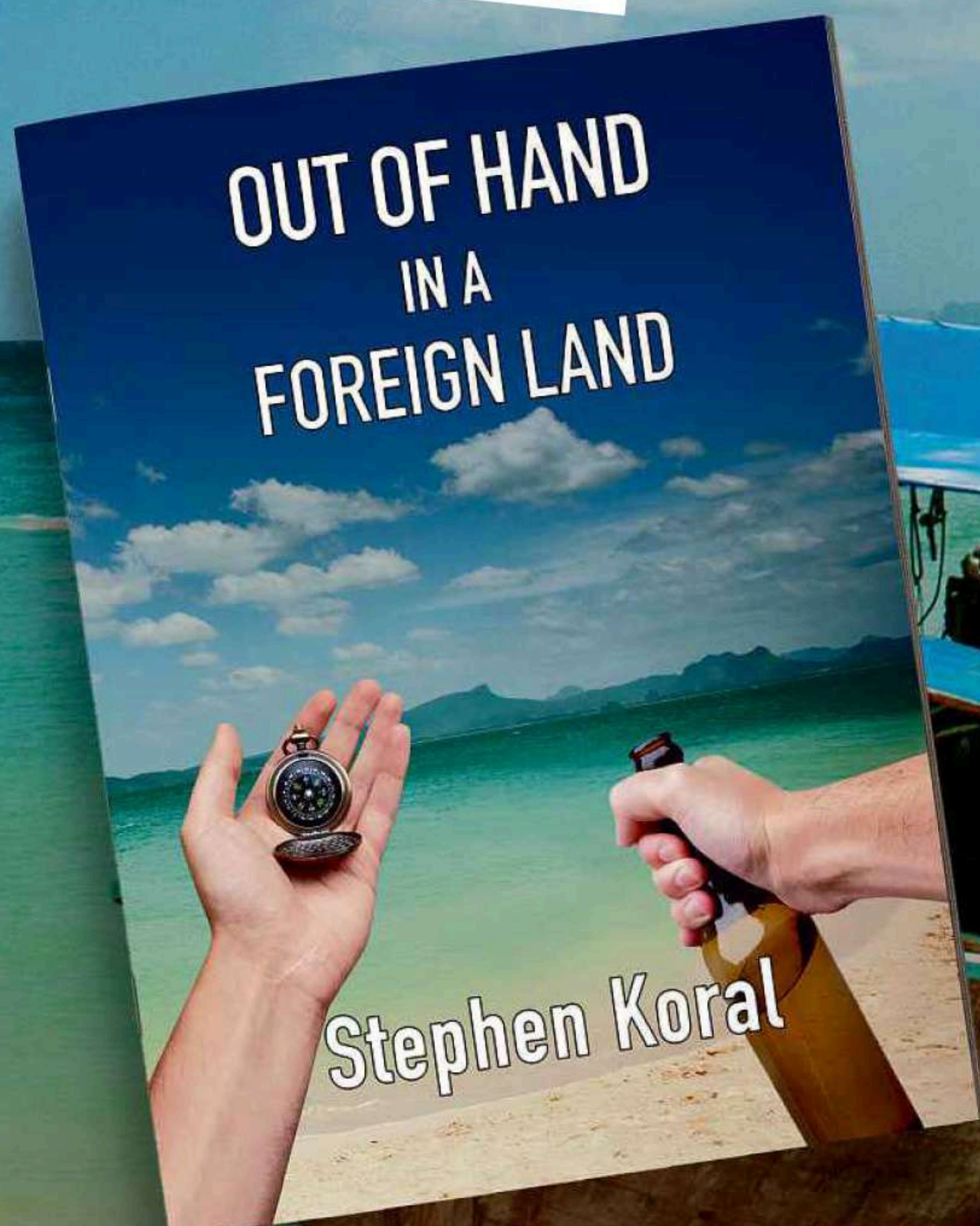
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Whether being chased by annoyed locals in India, getting completely lost in Sri Lanka, avoiding gun owners in Thailand, and possibly most dangerous of all - meeting his future wife, Koral tries to find humour in the difficult, but usually self-imposed troubles found backpacking alone on the road.



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THE BIRTH OF VENUS

Following an ostensible transition towards civilian government in 2011, on 1 February 2021 Burma’s in fact still all-powerful armed forces (or *Tatmadaw*) staged a violent coup to grasp full and open power once more, leading to shooting of civilian protestors and arrest of opposition politicians. What comes next is unclear, but the forecast is obvious as, appropriately for a Buddhist country, it has all happened many times before.

According to occidental astrological analysts, the problem is that the precise brand of astrology the Burmese use is derived from the Indian Vedic school of Hindu tradition, rather than the rival form



LEFT: Aung San Suu Kyi campaigning in 2015.

THE FAULT LIES NOT IN YOURSELVES, BUT IN YOUR STARS

Westerners are more familiar with. Burmese astrology, while sharing the same twelvefold division of the zodiac as us (albeit with some different ruling animals), charts its horoscopes upon a sidereal rather than a solar basis, taking the alignment of stars into account more than the relative tropical position of the Sun. Furthermore, the zodiacal days of the week govern Burmese destinies. Confusingly, there are nine of these, not seven, as you might expect. Six weekdays have their own unique sign, but Wednesday has two, one for am, one for pm.¹ Yet there is also a special ninth sign, Ketu, which rules over all the others – the number nine being considered easily the most auspicious of all digits domestically, echoing the customary Nine Virtues of Buddha. But age-old Vedic-style astrology does not make use of the once-unknown

planets Uranus, Neptune or Pluto, leading Western astrologers to guess that, in their ignorance of this powerful triumvirate, the soothsayers who advised Baby Burma be delivered at precisely 4.20am ensured her freedom would be stillborn. Precise analyses of the natal fate inadvertently ordained vary, but most agree Mars, God of War, was in a particularly elevated position on Independence Day; as a result, martial *Tatmadaw* rule down the barrel of a gun was inevitable. The position of Mars in relation to Mercury, Messenger of the Gods, was a most dominant one, enabling the junta to crush and control national media, via censorship. Jupiter, King of the Gods, was also rising at 4.20am, thus ensuring the emergence of a line of all-powerful dictators, while the complementary position of “Stabilising Saturn” meant Generalissimo Jupiter’s rule would be unassailable. Meanwhile, Pluto was in an orbit of influence too, Pluto being not only God of the Underworld, but also God of Gold. Burma once had the second-richest regional economy, blessed with natural resources like oil, rubies and timber, but no longer: corrupt *Tatmadaw* plutocrats pocketed the cash for themselves. One of the Generals’ main sources of income is drug-trafficking; the once-overlooked Neptune is the stellar “Ruler of Heroin”, heralding the dawn of a narco-state.

The sole hope lay in opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, born the daughter of Burma’s revered leader of military resistance to both British rule and later Japanese occupation, Aung San, on 19 June 1945 at the will of Heaven itself. Until the junta temporarily let her act as de facto Burmese PM (in name, anyway) from 2016-2021 during their fake decade-long pseudo-democratic experiment, and she began defending them against charges of genocide, Western do-gooders were always assuring Suu Kyi that “the Sun rises out of Uranus”, but some adulatory astrologers took this literally. Before her apparent collaboration,² the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner and devout Theravada Buddhist meditator (she had plenty of time to develop her skills during 15 years of *Tatmadaw* house-arrest) was acclaimed as a Bodhisattva, a Buddhist angel in human form, with acolytes placing

PHOTO DHARMA / CREATIVE COMMONS



AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: A painted ceiling at Kyauktawgyi Pagoda depicting the Burmese zodiac. ABOVE RIGHT: General Ne Win, the leader of the military junta that seized power in 1962.

her image in domestic shrines for home worship. Star-gazers have said Suu Kyi's horoscope shows her embodying Venus, Goddess of Love, in conjunction with Mars, making her a strong-willed peace-maker, redirecting her soldier father's indomitable will to win by making love not war. She also had a "Mars-Pluto square", as did Mandela and Gandhi, who each liberated their people in the end. Known simply as 'The Lady', when Burma's collective "Venus archetype" awoke, it was foretold Suu Kyi would sweep all before her. Yet today Venus's celestial body lies dimmed within *Tatmadaw* custody, charged with such heinous crimes as "the possession of illegal walkie-talkies" – another defeat for Mercury.³ As the Generals might say: the fault, dear Burmese, lies not in your selves but in your stars. There's absolutely zero you can do about your dismal cosmic kismet – so don't even try, or you'll end up behind bars too.

DESTINY'S CHILD

Burma was initially a democracy following Britain's 1948 exit, under the leadership of the liberation-hero U Nu, a self-proclaimed Bodhisattva himself. However, separatist insurgents ensured there was no true post-war peace, leading the Generals to first seize power on a caretaker basis in 1958, unifying the country by force. In 1960, U Nu returned as elected PM, but by 1962 the *Tatmadaw* were back for good. The Maoist-influenced junta of this era pursued a 'Burmese Way to Socialism', seizing private industry and expelling many of the nation's Indian-heritage traders, who had been brought in to help develop the economy under British rule. In earlier life, the military dictator who led both coups, General Ne Win, had seen his own business fail at the hands of

superior Indian competitors; he now made everyone else's businesses fail too, and what had once been the world's largest exporter of rice suffered the usual Maoist fate of food shortages. When Win's isolationist 'Bamboo Curtain' came down in 1962, GDP per capita was just below \$700; by 1988, when he finally went, it was around \$200, the only boom-industry left that of poppy-farming for the *Tatmadaw* opium fiends.

Comrade Win did OK, though, amassing an estimated fortune of \$4billion. In 1960, while still only caretaker leader, he had visited Communist China to sign a treaty of friendship. Come 1962, in imitation of the all-powerful Mao, Win adopted the title 'Chairman', tore up the constitution, abolished parliament and streamlined the lines of leadership: "One blood, one voice, one command," was the General's new slogan. Of Chinese ethnicity himself, Win's real birth-name was Shu Maung; his adopted dictator-name meant 'Brilliant Sun', first adopted as a *nom de guerre* while warring with London and Tokyo in the 1940s. This was not just vanity, but also Win's attempt to improve his astrological good fortune – a Burmese person's fate is thought to be determined by their name as well as their birth-stars. This was why, when Win was finally deposed in 1988, his successors changed Burma's name to 'Myanmar'; soothsayers guaranteed this would ensure the land a happier sidereal fate than it had enjoyed under Win's Sign of the Sun.⁴

Win was something of an amateur fortune-teller himself; if you didn't cross his palm with silver when he demanded it, he'd have you shot. Sometimes he would even shoot himself. When warned of impending assassination attempts, he would pump bullets into his own reflection in a mirror

in acts of apotropaic sympathetic magic. Likewise, when massacres were predicted, he would stand before a glass and trample in bowls full of dog-entrails and pig-blood to ensure the butchery affected only regime enemies. His official Board of Astrologers told him to beware of dogs, particularly those with crooked tails. Whenever he travelled, soldiers would clear streets of strays with guns. Dolphins were luckier for the General. He would bathe in tubs filled with their blood to lend him extended youth, only dying at the age of 92.

Advised that, as the embodiment of Burma's soul, the national lucky number of nine was his own favourable figure too, Win was bound to last into his nineties. Like a cat with a speech impediment, he also allegedly had nine wives.⁵ Just to make absolutely sure of nonagenarian status, in 1987 Win abruptly ordered all 100 *kyat* banknotes be withdrawn overnight and replaced by notes of 90 *kyat* and 45 *kyat*, with 4+5 equalling 9, and 90 divided by 2 being 45; hence his living until 92 (90+2).⁶ The sudden, unannounced policy was bad luck for his subjects, many of whom kept their cash under mattresses. Overnight, their pitiful, non-exchangeable savings were rendered worthless. Win would also walk over bridges backwards to propitiate spirits and appear at state functions dressed in classical regalia as an old-time Burmese king, fancying himself one of their rightful line. One of his nine wives' veins ran with true royal blood, which he hoped to absorb by association, albeit not in his Dolphin Bathroom this time. In 1970 he capriciously decreed all cars must drive on the right-hand side of the road, not the left as before, causing chaos as motorists' existing vehicles were obviously left-hand drive models. The alleged reason



GERHARD HUBER / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE LEFT: Burmese dictator General Than Shwe. ABOVE RIGHT: A jade Buddha is a recent addition to Shwedagon Pagoda – it's face looks suspiciously like that of the General...

was that an astrologer had advised him that his Maoist policies had taken Burma too far to the left, necessitating this most literal of remedies.⁷

Ne Win followed the Burmese magical tradition of *yadaya*, where numerological and other spells are prescribed by astrologers to alter your luck. In 1961, the elected PM U Nu had already ordered 60,000 sand-pagodas, whose measurements were based upon the sacred number nine, be constructed across Burma to end separatist rebellions on *yadaya* grounds, so Win was not unique. Yet *Tatmadaw* reliance on *yadaya* may be exaggerated for propaganda: if the junta have the stars on their side, as well as all the tanks, it makes them look harder to overthrow. Some tales told about Win have the hallmark of myths, in which the inscrutable leader's many diktats are simply ascribed to his belief in magic. He may have had other reasons for altering the Highway Code or the currency, but, as a Mao-style quasi-royal despot, felt no need to explain them to the "commoners" he so despised. Alternatively, some yarns were possibly spun wholesale by opposition figures who, although they often use *yadaya* too, know that portraying their rulers as mad dolphin-slayers at war with their own reflections makes them look unfit to rule in the eyes of less star-struck Western governments, who might impose harmful, anti-regime sanctions. By contrast, the more mainstream Buddhist Aung San Suu Kyi has specifically stated she does not possess magical powers, whatever her supporters may say. Even so, when her opposition movement rose up against Ne Win on 8 August 1988 – or 8/8/88 – they deliberately sought to counter the now evil number nine, whose sudden invasion of their banknotes helped spark the revolution.

General Win's forces counterattacked on 18 September, the ninth month ($1+8=9$). A 2007 anti-junta revolt was also suppressed beginning on the same date – rebels chose the wrong year, as $2+0+0+7=9$, causing an incredibly precisely-numbered crowd of 98,100 people ($9=8+1+0+0$) to rally to the junta's cause in response. Nonetheless, Ne Win was forced to stand down in 1988, causing the oppressed population to party like it was 1999; but, despite Win's exit, the *Tatmadaw* itself remained.⁸

COUNT YOURSELF LUCKY

Burma's dictator from 1992 onwards, General Than Shwe, had the competing lucky number of 11, with 65-year prison sentences for his opponents ($6+5=11$) being delivered at 11am during the 11th month of November. Amnesties for 9,002 lucky prisoners in the reverse-numbered year of 2009 reflected that $2+0+0+9=11$ too, even though the true number of prisoners released by 'The Bulldog' may have been just a few dozen, the 9,002 officially announced being merely symbolic. In 2009, he also toyed with using the junta's cash to buy Manchester United for \$1bn, planning to invest heavily in their first 11. There are '11 fires' in Buddhist tradition – ills like death, despair, ageing and pain – which Shwe sought to divert onto others via *yadaya*, thus making his 2011 retirement long and happy. Another way to evade these Buddhist ills was by transforming into a Buddha himself. When, in 2009, then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon visited Burma's sacred Shwedagon Pagoda on official business, he may have wondered why the new jade statue of Buddha on display looked so familiar – the answer being that it was carved with General Shwe's own face!

This surely helped counteract the *yadaya* voodoo-dolls reportedly commissioned by Ne Win's traitorous grandsons in 2002, one of which also bore the head of Shwe. A former KGB-trained psy-ops officer, Shwe perhaps invented this rumour himself as a way to discredit his rivals.

The 'Great Father' Shwe has even been seen openly dressing as the 'Great Mother' in items of women's clothing, not in order to celebrate diversity, but for *yadaya*. Opponents have accused Shwe of donning robes and engaging in cannibalistic rites of human sacrifice, but here he was just seeking to court Lady Luck through imitation of her feminine fashion-sense. As David Beckham once proved, men can wear sarongs too, but in Burma the male skirt is a *longyi*, whilst the female one is an *acheik*, identifiable by their distinctive patterns. In 2011, Shwe and his top Generals appeared on TV all wearing *acheik* skirts, looking to Burmese eyes like a coven of Eddie Wizzards. The popular view was that, by dressing like girls, the junta hoped to neutralise their nemesis Suu Kyi's innate female energies via *yadaya*, reversing The Lady's karma. Astrologers had prophesied a woman would one day rule the land, so by dressing accordingly, the Generals ensured 'she' would be General Shwe. Women's clothes are held to possess malign magical powers in Burma, as touching them drains a man's *hpoun*, or life-force; supposedly, knickers and sarongs are hidden in hotel rooms prior to foreign dignitaries' stays to make them more pliable. In 2007, exiled dissidents started a 'Panties for Peace' campaign, encouraging women to send Burmese Embassies worldwide pairs of used knickers to drain regime willpower. Wearing women's skirts willingly may have

caused such spells to rebound on their casters. A more plausible explanation is that *acheik* sarongs' patterns are based on those once worn by pre-colonial Burmese royalty, so the transgender *Tatmadaw* were just symbolically broadcasting their divine right to rule. Similarly, when in 2006 Than Shwe ordered Burmese farmers to devote their energies, and seven million acres of their land, towards growing physic nuts, even telling city-dwellers to plant some in their window boxes, the idea arose that the nut's native name, *kyet suu*, meant Monday-Tuesday – the reverse of Suu Kyi, meaning Tuesday-Monday. Thus, by planting Kyi Suu everywhere, Suu Kyi's own political growth would never take root. Actually, physic nut oil can be added to diesel and the junta just hoped to reduce their costly import of fuel-reserves, an idea so desperate that people preferred to invoke *yadaya* as an explanation instead.⁹

In 2020, 66 (that's 99 upside-down) statues of Buddha carved with odd spiky hair and "unusual hand-gestures" were erected in a monastery by regime elements, including General Shwe's family, accompanied by such this-worldly slogans as "May the throne be long established" and "Get promoted", suggesting inverted "occult practices" on behalf of military men wanting to regain the top table of power. Outraged religious authorities ordered the *yadaya* Anti-Buddhas be removed and given haircuts and new, less grasping hands. This was several months prior to the 2021 coup; was this true magical preparation, or merely another psy-op?¹⁰ This is the problem with the junta constantly going *yadayadayada* – the population really believe in it. When soldiers leave food offerings to dark spirits beneath opposition posters or spread alarming rumours about weeping Buddha statues before elections, voters may think of the Generals not as immovable astrologers

but evil necromancers, cursed by Buddha to reveal the transience of all things by losing power. In cities, giant yellow hands outside shops reveal an abundance of fortune-tellers, whose presence could turn voters renegade. In 1999, to accumulate much merit, the Generals funded renovation of Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda, only for an earthquake to strike it. By opportunistically plotting another revolution for 9/9/99 as a sequel to the previous one of 8/8/88, enemies sought to capitalise on the fortuitous tremor, albeit in vain. Suu Kyi's followers later tried calling 999 for help from Heaven by sending nine supporters to pray in nine chosen pagodas at 9am each day. Maybe this is why the temples keep collapsing. In 2009, with Suu Kyi on trial yet again, Rangoon's 2,300-year-old Danok Pagoda toppled, only three weeks after being renovated and rededicated in the presence of Than Shwe's wife; 20 workmen died in the collapse, a tragedy reportedly accompanied by "a bright red light" emitting "a strange haunting voice". As pagodas shake when given offerings by evil men, astrologers perceived the very temple had "repudiated Than Shwe's right to remain as ruler" via suicide, suggesting Buddha voted Suu Kyi. Censored media hyped the pagoda's refurbishment, yet failed to cover its fall; but, while astrologers who dole out negative anti-junta predictions can be arrested, slippery rumour itself cannot.¹¹ What other institutions might also fall across Burma in 2021? One recent online forecast predicted confidently that, as protests against their latest coup spread: "The military will be brutal during this period."¹² You don't need the stars to tell you that.

NEXT TIME: The Elephantom Menace – mapping the occult architecture of the junta's giant new ghost-capital, home of white elephants, Buddha's tooth and poltergeist-repelling scorpion-buildings.

NOTES

1 This was true in the traditional calendar; the splitting of Wednesday into two different signs was necessitated by adoption of the seven-day week.

2 We don't know what pressures Suu Kyi was under. Possibly she knew perfectly well she was being exploited to defend the indefensible, but parroted the junta's line, thinking that, if criticised as genocidal maniacs by domestic rivals, the Generals would make a bad situation even worse.

3 http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5_5c/entry-3-37.html; <https://oxfordastrologer.com/2010/11/burma-the-ugly-face-of-astrology.html>; <https://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199906/msg00073.html>; www.astrowow.com/blog/burma/; Suu Kyi herself denies being a Bodhisattva. "Oh, for goodness' sake, I'm nowhere near such a state at all," she said in 1995 when asked, citing her "terrible temper". (www.lionsroar.com/conversations-with-aung-san-suu-kyi/). The junta have intervened to prevent teenagers with similar astrological charts to The Lady from winning beauty contests, lest they acquire admirers as future Suu Kyis themselves (see Christina Fink, *Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule*, Zed Books, 2001, p.227).

4 Changing your birth name to attract a more favourable astrological fortune is not uncommon in Burma. The Burmese have no surnames, with the particular week day (from the traditional eight) you are born on determining the first letter of your given name, which then acts as a 'magic word' embodying your personality and fortune. Yet, if you still have bad luck, changing your birth name on astrological advice is a standard means of redress.

5 Reports differ – he married one poor woman twice. His most notable wife was June Rose Bellamy, the half-Australian great-granddaughter of the Victorian-era Burmese Crown Prince Kanaung Mintha. Bellamy's native given-name was Yadana Nat-Mei, meaning 'Goddess of the Nine Jewels'. Briefly a Hollywood actress, her 1976 marriage to Ne Win only lasted five months, the paranoid General concluding she was really a CIA spy.

6 His precise year of birth is disputed, which must have made things either easier or harder for his astrologers, depending on how you look at it.

7 www.economist.com/obituary/2002/12/12/ne-win; www.historyanswers.co.uk/people-politics/ne-win-the-burmese-dictator-who-bathed-in-blood/; www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1990-07-04-90002230767-story.html; www.theguardian.com/news/2002/dec/06/guardianobituaries; It was announced Burma would become Myanmar on 27 May 1988 (2+7=9), whilst the renaming officially came into effect on 18 June 1989 (1+8=9).

8 <https://archive.loyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/burma-superstitious-leaders>; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7025827.stm>

9 <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2053563,00.html>; www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/19/burma.martinhodgson

10 www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/occult-statues-buddha-undergoing-alterations-removal-myanmar-monastery

11 www.nytimes.com/2009/06/18/world/asia/18myanmar.html; www2.irrawaddy.com/opinion_story.php?art_id=393; www.mizzima.com/news-election-2015-election-news/myanmar-mystics-read-runes-historic-election/; Burma's most famous junta-sceptical, Suu Kyi-supporting astrologer is San Zarni Bo, who learnt the art while behind bars in the 1970s for non-esoteric anti-*Tatmadaw* activity (see www.myanmore.com/2019/11/san-zarni-bo-fate-and-the-future/).

12 <http://jupiterastrology.com/c8-mundane/burma-myanmar-in-political-turmoil-and-military-coup-history-future/>



ABOVE: Members of Burma's military government wearing *acheik* patterned *longyi* typically worn by women.

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Gloria's stall helps her pay for her children's education



Raised: £265.00
Needed: £622.10

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Vor Thoun's farm will provide jobs for her local community



Raised: £640.00
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Seeing is believing... or is it?

Hallucinations appear to be a surprisingly common experience in our everyday lives. **MARK GREENER** asks what this means for fortean phenomena.

Sceptics often dismiss ghosts, fairies and UFOs as people “just seeing things”. If you hear a poltergeist knocking, you’re “just hearing things”. The sulphurous smell of a demonic presence is “just” an olfactory hallucination. Some neurologists even ascribe the mystical experiences of, among other Christian saints, Catherine of Ricci, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Genoa to hallucinations. The mystics, these neurologists argue, experienced “ecstatic epilepsy”, which produces a profound sense of well-being, serenity, bliss and increased self-awareness.¹ But can we really be prone to hallucinations as we go about our daily lives?

Certainly, hallucinations are common in many illnesses. About four out of five people with schizophrenia hear voices (auditory verbal hallucinations), for example. Some people with Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, epilepsy, hearing loss, Bonnet’s syndrome and certain other eye diseases, and those withdrawing from alcohol and drugs can also experience hallucinations.²

Auras, which occur during or before at least a third of migraines, are another common cause of hallucinations, and some people experience migraine auras without developing headaches.³ Migraine auras can, for instance, cause Lilliputian or Brobdingnagian hallucinations, where objects can seem too small or too large respectively.⁴ A 53-year-old woman hallucinated



that she smelt a “dirty dog” as part of her migraine aura, which, usually, did not develop into a headache. The smell lasted between 30 seconds and an hour and could occur two or three times during a day.⁵

Despite our veneer of civilisation, life often remains nasty and brutish. Up to seven in 10 people experience or witness a traumatic event, such as being physically or sexually assaulted, involved in a car accident or seeing someone blown apart by a bomb.⁶ A study of 2,064 young people found that by 18 years of age, almost a third (31.1%) had been exposed to trauma and about one in 12 (7.8%) experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Those exposed to trauma were almost three times (2.64-fold increase) more likely to experience psychotic symptoms than those who did not experience trauma. Those with PTSD were about eight times (8.44-fold increase) more likely to experience psychotic symptoms.⁷ Hallucinations are, of course, the hallmark symptom of psychosis.

Nevertheless, hallucinations are common even among people without detectable physical, psychiatric or mental illness, especially following a traumatic event such as bereavement. In a landmark study published during the early 1970s about half of widows and widowers interviewed

in Wales reported seeing their dead spouse.⁸ More recent studies suggest that between one in 50 and one in 10 (2-10%) of us experience hallucinations daily.⁹

Norwegian researchers, for example, sent a postal questionnaire to 2,533 adults and used a well-established, validated scale to assess the frequency of auditory verbal hallucinations. About one in 14 (7.3%) said they had experienced an auditory verbal hallucination at least once. About one in 100 heard voices daily (0.88%), several times a week (1.01%) or several times a month (1.00%). Approximately one in 33 heard voices monthly or less (3.32%) and annually or less (2.77%).¹⁰ In another study, about one in 17 (6%) of the general population reported phantosmia – phantom odours.¹¹

Furthermore, a paper summarising research into visual hallucinations found that about one in 14 (7.3%) of the general population said they experienced visual hallucinations, about a quarter of the rate among people with schizophrenia (27%). When the authors excluded people with physical diseases and those taking drugs, one in 17 (6%) of the general population reported visual hallucinations. Many people experience both visual and auditory hallucinations, suggesting a common underlying biological cause.¹²

In other words, hallucinations are common in the general population, which will, no doubt, give the sceptics succour. Indeed, only one in 6 (16%) of those who experienced auditory verbal hallucinations in the Norwegian study sought professional help because of their visions. Many studies depend on people recognising and, given the stigma that still surrounds mental illness, being willing to admit that they have experienced hallucinations. So hallucinations in healthy people may be even more common in the general population than the current estimates suggest;

and some hallucinations may, of course, be symptoms of an unrecognised underlying disease.

Common they may be, but hallucinations don’t come close to explaining all the diverse range of phenomena in the fortean wunderkammer – or even every ghost, UFO or poltergeist. For that matter, for me, a diagnosis of ecstatic epilepsy doesn’t come close to accounting for the rich mystic Christian traditions. Nevertheless, paranormal investigators need to try to exclude these as possible causes, especially as scientists now recognise that there’s not a clear cut-off point between ‘normal’ perception and hallucinations.¹³ After all, when does a vivid daydream or hypnagogic vision become an hallucination – or a fortean phenomenon?

NOTES

- 1** *Epilepsia* 1999;40:239-241; *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 2016;10.
- 2** *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 2019;23:114-127; *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 2014;40:S233-S245.
- 3** *International Journal of Epidemiology* 1995;24:612-618.
- 4** *The Journal of Headache and Pain* 2019;20.
- 5** *Headache* 2016;56:1494-1502.
- 6** *Clinical Psychology Review* 2019;69:67-82.
- 7** *The Lancet Psychiatry* 2019;6:247-256
- 8** *British Medical Journal* 1971;4:37-41.
- 9** *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 2019;23:114-127.
- 10** *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 2015;56:508-515.
- 11** *Headache* 2016;56:1494-1502.
- 12** *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 2014;40:S233-S245.
- 13** *Current Psychiatry Reports* 2005;7:162-7.

♦ **MARK GREENER** is a Cambridge-based medical writer and the clinical editor of *Pharmacy Magazine*. He writes regularly for a number of publications, including *Fortean Times*.

Unknown forces

BRETT TAYLOR explores the fortean side of Nobel Prize winning writer Isaac Bashevis Singer.

Of all the writers ever to win the Nobel Prize, it's hard to think of any who were as obsessed with fortean subjects as Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991), whose given name was Yitskhok Bashevis. Often stereotyped as a specifically Jewish author, he might as well be called a fortean one.

As a Yiddish-speaking child in Poland, Isaac was taught to accept miracles: "The whole Jewish life in the Exile was one big miracle." It was his father, a mystical rabbi, who implanted the notion of the supernatural, telling the children that hobgoblins could take over houses and demons could live in cellars. Apparently, he did this to instill in the youngsters the notion that the supernatural world was quite real. In 1910, Rabbi Pinchas Mendel Singer, wary of rural poverty, moved his family to an apartment in Warsaw. The only place to relieve oneself was a courtyard outhouse, filthy and rat infested. Rather than go there, some residents would do their business on the stairs. Walking up this dimly lit staircase filled young Yitskhok, then only six, with terror – he was convinced he was being pursued by "all the devils, evil spirits, imps of whom my parents spoke." Even the sounds of wailing cats reminded the little boy of spirits. He would run back to the apartment, where his sleep would be disturbed by sweat-drenched nightmares.

One bizarre and frankly ridiculous anecdote demonstrates the father's weakness in the face of superstition. A local woman came to the rabbi with a basket containing two dead geese and the bizarre claim that the fowl

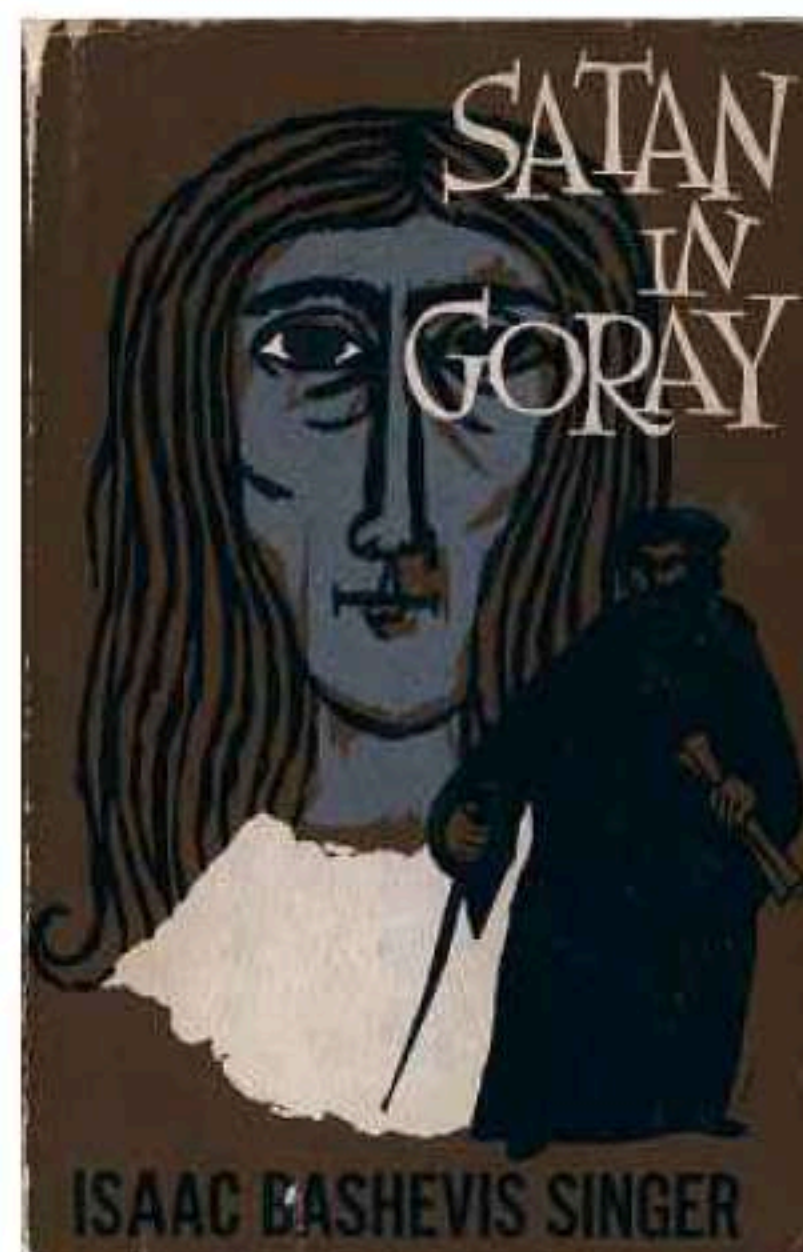


ABOVE: Isaac Bashevis Singer photographed in Manhattan in 1973.

continued to shriek even after she slaughtered them. Father and son were terrified by this seeming proof of the supernatural. So frightened was the father that he actually ran away in fear. The mother kept her cool and offered a rational explanation: that the shrieks were mere expulsions of air and would stop when the windpipes were removed. It was up to her to disprove the story – which she did.

As Isaac grew into his teens, he became obsessed with sex. "I thought I was going crazy," he said, "or was possessed by a *dybbuk*." But the scientific books he read taught that miracles and the supernatural did not exist. In his 20s, he began to read books on the supernatural: "I began to see that all these miracles are not complete superstition." His father was superstitious, his mother rational. All his life, Isaac would waver between the two points of view. One of his finest

"I began to see that all miracles are not complete superstition"



stories, "The Séance", concludes, somewhat anticlimactically, with a debate on the afterlife between the main characters, a female trance medium and a sceptical old man, her lover.

Older and now successful, Isaac grew resolute in his belief that powerful unseen forces were at work in the world, for good and for bad; but he claimed angels made for dull fiction, and so many of his most vivid stories involve demons. "The Last Demon" and "The Unseen" are even narrated by demons, the latter possibly Satan himself. His first novel *Satan in Goray* is a tale of possession. Even some of his more realistic works contain casual supernatural references. *The Slave*, frequently regarded as his best novel, includes a casual mention of the mediæval witch Baba Yaga, who supposedly swept away the daylight every evening with her broom.

"The Enemy" shows Singer's



anecdotal style at its plainest and possibly most deceptive. Since the narrator is unnamed, we must decide for ourselves: is this something that actually happened to Singer, or is the whole thing a fantasy? Reading in the Fifth Avenue Public Library, the narrator is surprised to be approached by a little old man he hasn't seen since World War II. The old man shares a troubling experience: while travelling on an ocean liner he was persecuted by a waiter, who might be a ghost, or an anti-Semite, or a psychotic with a grudge. The old man, whose name is Chaikin, spends a night of terror when the waiter emerges from a mist and attempts to shove him overboard. Chaikin instead pushes the waiter over the side, but then sees him later at a New York tavern. The narrator automatically deduces that the would-be assassin was a malevolent astral spirit. (Any Freudian worth his salt would have interpreted the malevolent antagonist as a doppelgänger projection of repressed homoerotic desire, but Singer was resolutely indifferent to Freudian interpretations.)

The narrator's credulity is no doubt helped by the book he is reading when he is first reunited with his long-lost friend: *The Phantoms of the Living*, a tome on wraiths and astral spirits. This could be proof of synchronicity, or it could be that his readings have primed him to believe; it's striking that he is more willing to accept the reality of the experience than the old man himself, who dismisses it as a drunken fantasy or dream. It is also possible that Singer himself had such a dream while on a journey and split his personality in two for the sake of storytelling. "The Enemy" was published in Kirby McCauley's anthology *Dark Forces: New Stories of Suspense and Supernatural Horror* (1980), where many horror-hungry readers no doubt overlooked the outwardly modest tale in favour of Stephen King's crowd-pleasing novella "The Mist," with its array of oversized insects.

Singer's life was marked by a longing to make contact with the other side, a longing which seems to have gone sadly unfulfilled.

While teaching at Bard College in the mid-Seventies, Singer lived in a Manhattan apartment that he claimed was haunted. He never saw the ghost, but he knew it was there. Singer's biographer Paul Kresh does not say *how* he knew it was there. Perhaps he simply sensed a ghostly presence, but it is also possible that he specifically chose the apartment because he'd heard it was haunted and wanted to make contact. One would-be author brought him a story that he thought was awful, but he dared not give his honest opinion. This was not due to politeness so much as a fear that the man might become suicidal.

Later, the wannabe writer was visited by his dead father while sitting on a bench in Central Park. For whatever reason, the dead father warned him not to publish. Singer envied the man, because he was able to contact the dead and was obedient enough to follow their advice.

Not only that, but he was so heartened by the man's story that he claimed it added years to his life.

Singer read every book on the occult he could find, and he subscribed to magazines on the subject. Asked about his preoccupations in 1975, he responded: "I read all the books and magazines of the crackpots. I consider myself one of the crackpots. But I don't really believe that Buddha is ready to appear every time a couple of men and women in Brooklyn call him. Yet I have no axe to grind. There may be such things as psychic premonitions and psychic experiences. Yet I cannot really tell you that I saw a ghost." One has to wonder if he ever picked up a copy of *Fortean Times* at some point.

One story, "The Psychic Journey", revolves around an incident that begins when its narrator spies an article in a paranormal journal called *The Unknown*. The narrator has to be on the ball to get his favourite outré magazines because they

sell out so quickly. For some reason, Brooklyn residents are particularly interested in the supernatural, or so the narrator observes. He soon meets a woman who shares his interests – in fact, she gets *fortean* magazines from as far away as India. The psychic theme doesn't really develop, but the story does imply that being a "witch" (i.e. medium) might make a woman more alluring, even if the narrator does ultimately opt to return home with a more "rational" woman. The narrator has an odd fascination with Houdini, who he is convinced possessed spiritual powers, despite proclaiming himself a

sceptic.

Paul Kresh, Singer's friend and biographer, claimed the critics were disgruntled with Singer's "shoddy mysticism". Perhaps publishers feared that it would turn off highbrow readers. The 1974 novel *Soul Expeditions* first appeared, as did

most of Singer's novels, as a serial in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, in Yiddish. By the time it appeared in English, four years later, its title had been changed to the less mystical-sounding *Shosha*, after the main female character. Actually, it was probably Singer himself who made the change. Mindful of goyish tastes, he tended to make alterations to his works, which he personally helped translate, tailoring them for a wider audience. The novel's most autobiographical character is Feitelzohn, a lover of life (i.e. dirty old man) and a believer in the occult. Explaining the unknown in Spinoza-like terms, Feitelzohn says: "There are unknown forces, yes, there are, but they're all part of the mystery called nature." It is typical of Singer that his character should follow a flight of mysticism with a casual offer of "cookies as old as Methuselah". Shoddy or not, Singer would not abandon his interest in the supernatural. He would cite the work of Dr Joseph Banks Rhine, who coined the term "extra sensory perception"

in his 1935 book of the same name, as evidence of psychic powers.

On the other hand, a later biographer, Janet Hadda, claimed that it was Singer's references to the supernatural that appealed to English-speaking reviewers in the first place. Orville Prescott in the *New York Times* singled out the book's references to "werewolves, vampires, dibbiks and even of smoks". When Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1978, the *Washington Post* credited much of his appeal to "supernatural legend and folklore."

Amusingly, Singer's son Israel attributed his father's Nobel Prize to the Swedish fondness for trolls! Implying that his dad's supernatural leanings were what made him appealing, the younger Singer was making a joke, but it is worth noting that the Swedish papers called the author a "little elf".

As for Singer's own beliefs, he claimed not really to believe in supernatural phenomena, even as he was clearly obsessed by the subject. David Stromberg, the editor of Singer's papers, notes: "In general, my guess would be that Singer read more about séances than attended them, though I'm sure he also attended some. I don't think it was something he did on a regular basis, but I'm sure he read about the supernatural on a regular basis, for most of his life." Since a number of Singer's papers have yet to be translated into English, it's possible that some of them may shed new light on his obsession with the mystical world.

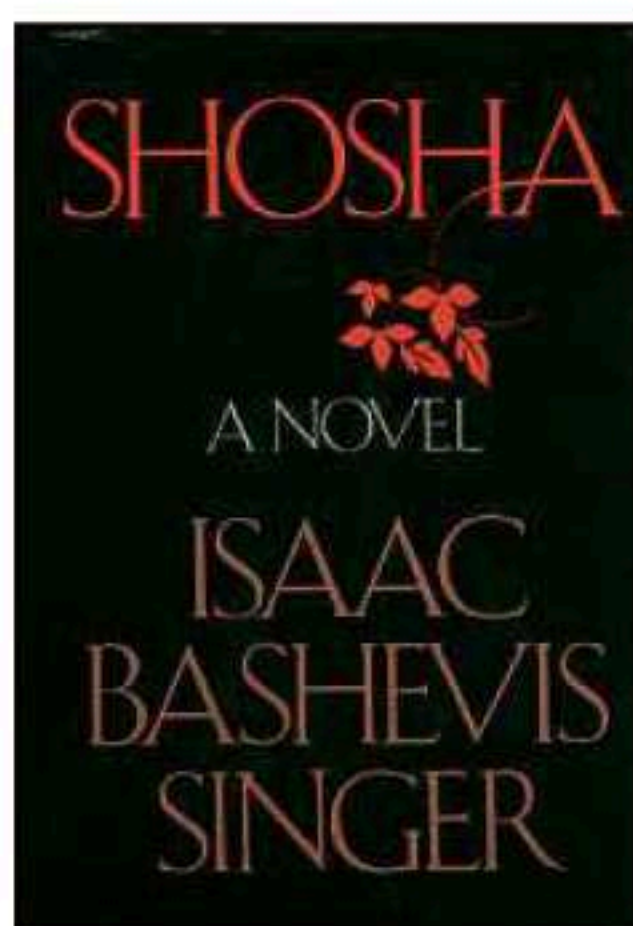
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♦ BRETT TAYLOR has worked as a writer, photographer, union steward, tiger keeper, and poker player. He has written for FT, Filmfax, *Skeptical Inquirer*, and *The South Carolina Review*.



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Challenging orthodox science

Bob Rickard praises an intelligent and informed scholar who is bravely striking at the roots of how science should tackle provocative anomalies

Radical Transformation

The Unexpected Interplay of Consciousness and Reality

Imants Barušs

Imprint Academic 2021

Pb, 228pp, £14.95, ISBN 9781788360418

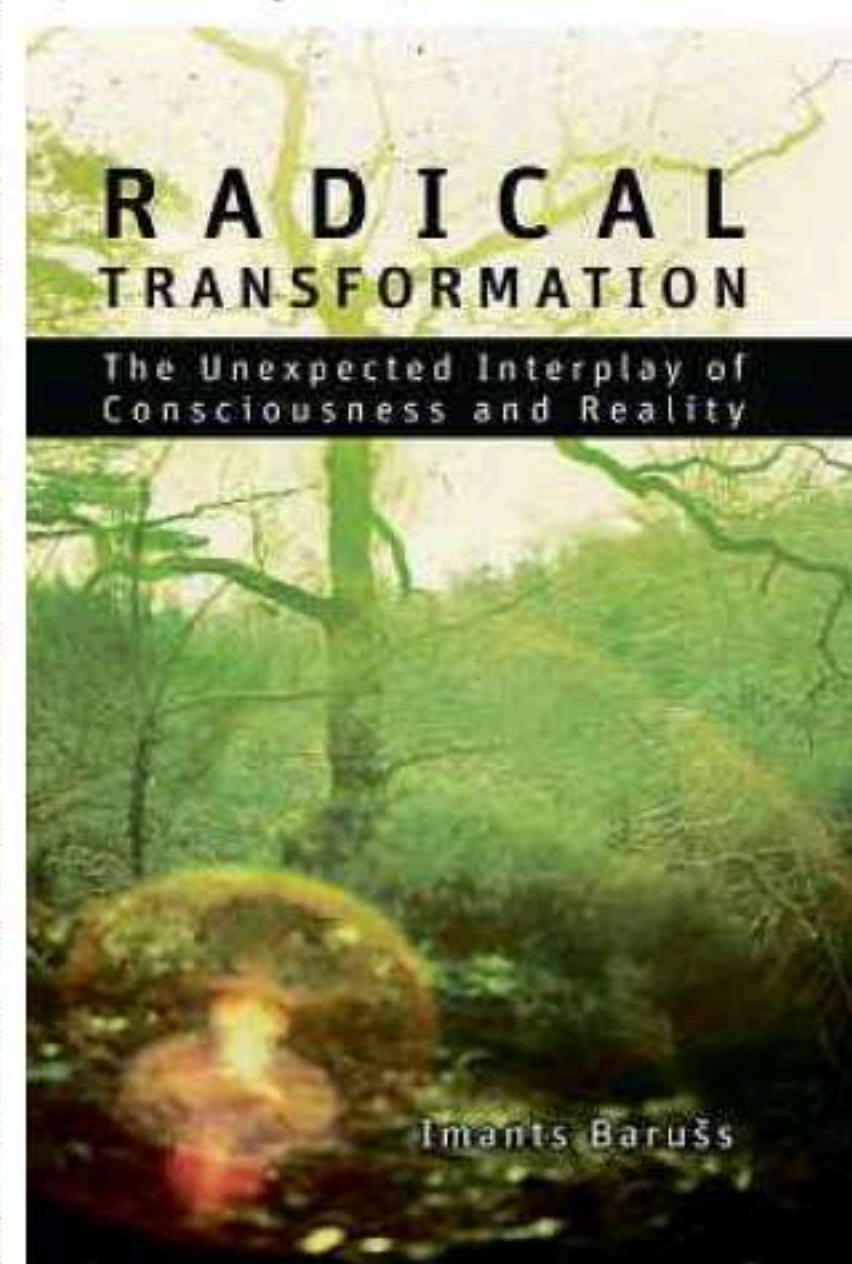
The late William Corliss was very fond of a particular quotation from the 19th-century psychologist William James. At the front of his *Sourcebook* anthologies (of anomalies reported in scientific journals), Corliss would put this passage:

“Round about the accredited and orderly facts of every science there ever floats a sort of dust-cloud of exceptional observations, of occurrences minute and irregular and seldom met with, which it always proves more easy to ignore than to attend to ... Anyone will renovate his science who will steadily look after the irregular phenomena, and when the science is renewed, its new formulas often have more of the voice of the exceptions in them than of what were supposed to be the rules.”

In the 19th century, the venerable academy of anthropologists and historical folklorists was confronted by a new breed of scholar more interested in “fieldwork”, recording the living experiences of shamans, mediums, spiritualists and the like. Where the old archivists and cultural revisionists were content to codify sagas and legends, the new took an active part in firewalking, telepathy or the use of trance, frequently discussing the apparent “reality” of parapsychological and psychological phenomena. The animosity – including character assassination of opponents of either party – became so notorious that Scottish anthropologist and folklorist Andrew Lang wrote a scathing

commentary, calling it the “War of Two Sisters”. Of greater interest, he describes how the conflict gave rise to the formation of the Society for Psychical Research, backed by many of the world’s top scientists and thus reconciling the different approaches.

Similar rifts have opened on the fronts of other, different fields of science and have failed to be resolved as the “old guard” digs in and firmly rejects, *a priori*, the proponents of the new. One of these – discussed here by Imants Barušs – is currently in progress as orthodox anthropologists (who like to keep the subject at arm’s length) are closing ranks against their fellows who argue that the religious and mystical experiences triggered by entheogens (consciousness-



altering substances) can only be fully understood by directly experiencing the drugs themselves.

Behind such animosities is the entrenchment of materialistic physicalism in the academic establishment, creating a formidable obstacle to any serious (even scientific) discussion about mental, psychical or mystical phenomena. It is a brave orthodox

Anthropologists and folklorists took an active part in firewalking, telepathy or the use of trance

scientist who risks his tenure and the fury of his colleagues, who sheds the biases of his profession and is willing to engage with the investigation and theorising of truly profound anomalies.

Barušs is such a hero – an accredited academician who is striking at the very roots of precisely how orthodox science should tackle provocative anomalies. He is a psychology professor at King’s University College at the University of Western Ontario, an editor of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* and a founder of the Society for Consciousness Studies, with many books and papers behind him, and he firmly believes that a new approach to physicalism is both necessary and not beyond contemporary science.

Within a few opening paragraphs, Barušs goes directly to the heart of the problem. He “takes up several substantive issues that arise in the new academic landscape supporting the study of consciousness, moving away... from materialist versions of reality toward some yet-to-be-articulated post-materialist interpretation”. He declares that, with colleagues, he has reviewed the empirical evidence and is certain that some version of consciousness is not a by-product of brain activity, that it is not confined to a physical locality (i.e. has non-local properties including “the ability to perceive and act at a distance”), and that

it appears to survive the death of the body.

He begins with a short critique of the current theories of consciousness and in clear, understandable prose, explains why they are incomplete. He then introduces a scheme of at least 10 significant variations of consciousness. Existing theories of the ordinary waking state are first shown to be wholly inadequate. The remainder – including hypnosis, sleep, dissociation, drug-induction, transcendence, impending death and others – are shown to be distinct states with their own phenomenologies and therefore worthy of much further engagement.

Fortean topics such as out-of-the-body abduction scenarios are freely discussed here; but, for once, this is by an intelligent and informed scientist eager to find elements worthy of serious investigation. He understands and explains precisely why science is wrong to exclude them. Barušs’s conclusion is that human consciousness itself is sleepwalking towards planetary disaster if we can’t learn to understand our own mind and how it creates and uses a protean, non-local, multiphasic “reality” – the eponymous “radical transformation”.

This is definitely not hysterical waffle from a crank – we’ve seen enough of those at Fortean Towers to know the difference. Here is a lucid, rational and surprisingly readable dissection of precisely why today’s materialistic science and medicine have failed us in crucial areas. This deceptively modest book may be one of the most important steps on the way to a better understanding of the many genuine mysteries of the human mind. Fortean, do not pass it by!

★★★★★

Higher than God's hat

Andy Roberts finds that Hawkwind's songs were steeped in forteen themes

Hawkwind: Days of the Underground

Radical Escapism In The Age of Paranoia

Joe Banks

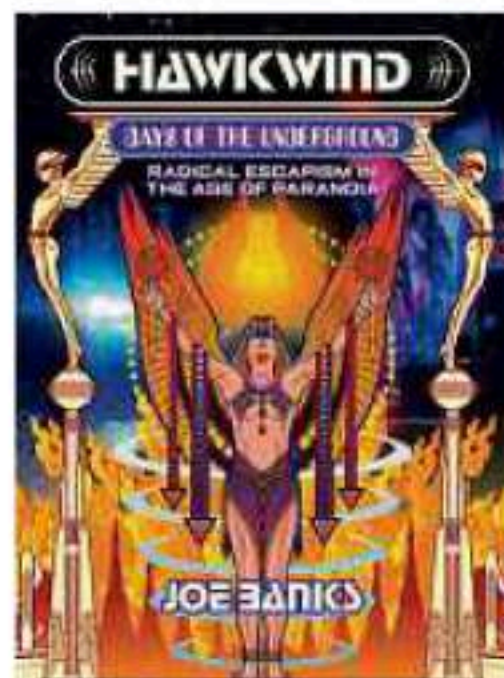
Strange Attractor Press 2020

Pb, 496pp, £22, ISBN 9781907222849

If there were ever a band who embodied the psychedelic British hippie underground it is Hawkwind. Often pigeonholed as "space rock", but in reality much broader and deeper than that, their music and band philosophy grew out of the heady days of late-Sixties psychedelic and social experimentation and has been the soundtrack to hundreds of thousands of LSD trips ever since.

But peer beneath the driving rhythms, swirling electronics and Barney Bubbles's psychedelic light shows and Hawkwind reveal themselves at heart to be a band steeped in forteen themes. The vasty deeps of outer space were their primary concern, but this was also a knowing metaphor for inner space, a destination requiring only a tab of acid and not an Apollo rocket! The subject matter of Hawkwind's lyrics reflects their many forteen interests; early songs such as "Orgone Accumulator" hinting at knowledge of Wilhelm Reich, while other songs from the 1970s touch on space and time travel, ecological disaster, a prelapsarian utopia, telepathy, replicants, levitation, mind control, strange phenomena, altered states of consciousness and beyond. These themes were drawn together in Hawkwind's 1972 *Space Ritual* album and tour which transcended space and time to create a physical and aural experience which took the percipient off planet and out of their heads. You were never the same again!

Between 1971 and 1986 Hawkwind intermittently collaborated with prolific fantasy writer Michael Moorcock who provided occasional vocals, lyrics, and inspiration. His forteen concept of the Multiverse and the Eternal Champion chimed with Hawkwind's psychedelic vision, and Moorcock contributed to several albums including *Space Ritual* and *Warrior at the Edge of Time* on which he intoned prophetically over trippy ambient space rock. Always ahead of the game, in 1971 Hawkwind pre-figured society's fears of impending ecological doom in their song "We Took The Wrong Step Years Ago", with "Look around and see the warnings close at hand/Already



weeds are writing their scriptures in the sand". And they could be funny too. Listen to *Quark, Strangeness and Charm's* lyrics about the problems Einstein had getting laid, for instance!

Above everything else, Hawkwind were the musical and lifestyle vanguard of a social movement, a somewhat blurred crusade of people at odds with modern society who yearned for more, for better, for different, for individual and collective freedoms and the right to get higher than God's hat! Hawkwind gigged relentlessly throughout the 1970s, becoming the "house band" for hippies and freaks, often playing at free festivals held at ancient sites such as Stonehenge where they provided a soundtrack of British Tribal Music for the socially dispossessed and musically curious.

Joe Banks has done a fine job of capturing Hawkwind's zeitgeist perfectly, and with its hugely informative text, numerous photographs, interviews, disc and filmographies and track-by-track dissection of their albums it can't really be faulted.

★★★★★

Calling the Spirits

A History of Seances

Lisa Morton

Reaktion Books 2020

Hb, 351pp, £15.99, ISBN 9781789142808

The word séance conjures up images of a serious group holding hands around a table in a darkened parlour, or a less serious group around a ouija board. However, Lisa Morton covers a lot more ground than the séance as she charts the many ways the living have attempted to contact those who have gone before.

She begins with accounts of summoning spirits in antiquity, then proceeds chronologically, tracking the ways in which methods of communication have changed over the centuries. The early chapters, on Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Norse and Celtic intercourse with spirits, and Christian attitudes to necromancy in the Middle Ages are fairly brief, but as Morton moves towards the modern period, and sources are more plentiful, the level of detail increases.

Reaching the 1840s, she examines the spread of Spiritualism and associated showmanship. Short sections are devoted to such stars as the Fox sisters, the Davenport brothers, Daniel Dunglas Home, Florence Cook, Helen Duncan, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini. She briefly addresses phenomena such as spirit photography, slate writing and ectoplasm, before tracking the fluctuating fortunes of Spiritualism – and attempts to talk to the dead more broadly – into the 20th century.

For what purports to be a historical survey there are serious omissions, most glaringly the physical mediumship circle at Scole, Norfolk, and the Felix Group in Germany, both of which have received extensive publicity. Séances in the 21st century are dispatched in two pages and apparently are more or less confined to the Lily Dale Spiritualist community in New York State, and the Internet.

Depictions on stage and screen warrant only half-a-dozen pages despite being a crucial element in shaping the way the séance is widely perceived, particularly the ouija board's lamentable associa-

tion with demons. A section titled "The fall of parapsychology" implies incorrectly that there is now no academic research into the possibility of afterlife communication, while "The new psychical researchers" (a heading one would like to think is ironic but probably isn't), actually deals with television reality shows in the *Most Haunted* mould.

Morton has provided an even-handed overview but attempts to cram in too much at the expense of depth, and – apart from what is contained in the online archive of the International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals – largely relies on secondary sources. The result is readable and a good jumping-off point for further exploration, but omissions and occasional inaccuracies mean caution is required.

Tom Ruffles

★★★

Stonehenge for the Ancestors

Part 1: Landscape and Monuments

Mike Parker Pearson et al

Sidestone Press 2020

Pb, 602pp, £90, ISBN 9789088907029

In 1998 archaeologists Mike Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina proposed a new interpretation for Stonehenge. Inspired by present-day funerary practice in Madagascar, where standing stones are still erected, Stonehenge was explained as a monument to the ancestors. A direct relationship was suggested between the stone monument (a place of the dead) and the nearby timber circle complex of Durrington (a place of the living). Since man-made avenues connect both sites to the River Avon, it was further proposed that, in prehistory, the river facilitated a journey from life to death that was both physical and symbolic. Research questions raised by this hypothesis have since guided fieldwork programmes such as the 2003-2009 Stonehenge Riverside Project that is to be reported fully in four volumes, this being the first. It takes a long time to write these things.

With 600 pages, this brick of a book is expansive; at £180 for the hardback, it is also expensive. The paperback costs half that, but still weighs 4lb (1.8 kg) and is rather



unwieldy. Fortunately, both come with a free digital copy and, admirably, the entire book may be read online for free. The quality of writing is consistently high and complemented by numerous illustrations, many in colour.

This volume begins by considering the landscape and monuments of the fourth millennium BC – the long barrows and cursus constructed a thousand years before the Stonehenge monument we know today. Next, Stonehenge's Welsh bluestones are examined in detail, followed by its sarsen stones. A very recent study tracing the sarsens' origins to West Woods near Marlborough is fortunately included. Human and animal remains, flint tools and other finds are duly reported. For me, the most fascinating aspect is the role played by the River Avon in the Stonehenge landscape and its importance to Neolithic people. A canoe trip through the area, from Durrington Walls to Lake Bottom, is described minute by minute, with all the disorientating effects of high cliff banks and meanders noted.

For Stonehenge researchers this is essential reading. A staggering amount of information came out of the Stonehenge Riverside Project and work continues; every year seems to bring some new major discovery in the Stonehenge landscape. So it is all the more incredible that the UK Government has given the go-ahead for a road tunnel that will destroy part of this World Heritage Site forever. What will future generations think of us for letting that happen?

Steve Marshall

★★★★★

Fake Heritage

Why We Rebuild Monuments

John Darlington

Yale University Press 2020

Hb, 248pp, £25, ISBN 9780300246766

In relating the secret marriage of Henry VIII to Elyzabeth Sympleston, daughter of a wealthy London wool merchant, on 28 January 1547, this book opens with a kind of head-test (complete with portrait) that pleases this admirer of Robert Anton Wilson. I had to check that the story exists only

in this book, perhaps proving that I am a bit of a Sympleston myself. Everything that follows is "real fake", i.e. it exists. "Welcome to the Palæo-ironic Era", declares the author, executive director of a UK charity for architectural conservation.

In this world where fakery of news and information is turning large areas of culture into the plot of a RAW or Philip K Dick tale, why does fake heritage – a practice going back to antiquity – exist? From dictatorial aggrandisement to religious belief to urban idealism, there are different reasons. Old sells; it is familiar, comforting, profitable.

China leads in replicating heritage architecture with samples from nearly every major global city, and several scale copies of the Eiffel Tower, found there. Thames Town near Shanghai is inspired by Bath and Oxford. The Austrian lake village of Hallstatt is copied in Guangdong Province. Dulwich College has a twin in Singapore. A Japanese university copied Beatrix Potter's house. Never mind that the Parthenon is ruined – there's a brand new one in Nashville, Tennessee. Many of England's new buildings and streets are historical pastiches yet only grant-worthy examples are noted. Of Classic-revival follies, only what still remains are included, so I must mention William Beckford, creator of Fonthill Abbey, an astounding Gothic skyscraper (which collapsed). Can we get the Chinese to rebuild that, and do it properly this time?

Spurious history and archaeology is booming, so the well-trodden examples found here (the Cardiff Giant, Piltdown Man, Nazis and others) would have benefited from active cases like the Bosnian Pyramids. Questions of aesthetics and intention are illustrated with personal favourites like Damien Hirst's *Treasures of the Wreck of the Unbelievable* exhibition, and French recreations of caves with prehistoric paintings. The destruction wreaked by ISIL/Daesh and subsequent efforts to reverse it, are covered, as are many other significant buildings and museums. Concisely written, and the numerous colour images are excellent.

Jerry Glover

★★★★★

The Immortality Key

The Secret of the Religion with No Name

Brian C Muraresku

St Martin's Press 2020

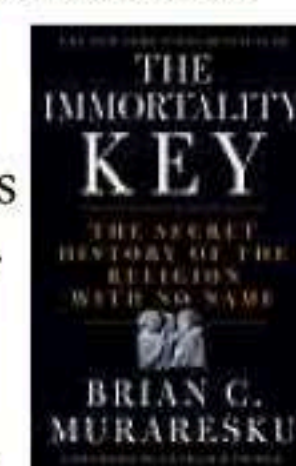
Hb, 460pp, £23.99, ISBN 9781250207142

Fortean of a certain age may recall the furore caused by Carl Ruck's *The Road to Eleusis* (written with R Gordon Wasson and Albert Hoffman), a book that suggested both that the Eleusinian Mysteries were based on a psychotropic drug experience, and that psychotropic ritual lay at the heart of early Christianity in the form of the Eucharist. It turned out to be a career killer for Ruck; but 40 years later, American author Brian Muraresku has taken up the Eleusinian gauntlet and run with it.

Much has happened in those 40 years, and quite a heap of evidence has turned up to support the original hypothesis. Ruck himself has continued to research and write on the subject, from the academic margins, and it is his work that drives this book, in the main. That, and two interconnected and equally for- tean themes: recent experiments with psilocybin that suggest the drug can induce religious experiences in the user; and evidence from sites such as Gobleki Tepe that our ancient ancestors were drinking psych- edelic beer some 12,000 years ago.

Muraresku makes a – fairly – good fist of bringing the evidence up to date, and drawing a line of psychedelic succession from ancient Anatolia, via Eleusis, to the early, Hellenic forms of paleo-Christianity, and on to the witch hunts of mediæval Europe. He is clearly a passionate believer in the perennial religion (though oddly he hasn't tried out the drug experience for himself). The scholarly effect is spoiled a bit by the irritating, slightly breathless, nerdy-gonzo narrative style, which sadly characterises much of contemporary popular science writing: the thesis as airport novel.

Nonetheless, this is a good read for those interested in the pagan continuity hypothesis, and the extension of it both through time and geographical location. And it's nice to see Ruck



vindicated properly after all these years.

Noel Rooney

★★★★★

The Wig

A Hairbrained History

Luigi Amara, tr. Christina MacSweeney

Reaktion Books 2020

Hb, 256pp, £15, ISBN 9781789143461

The author is a Mexican poet; this hair-raising effusion on the meaning of the wig probably sounds better in Spanish. Don't expect a history: the text rambles around time and space; its discursive style is a pale imitation of commentators like Michel Foucault. Endless sentences flow through painful puns, would-be wordplay, twisted clichés and over-use of the word "capillary".

Amara flits from mourning jewellery to veneration of saints' body parts, from crimes committed in drag to Roman statues with their own wardrobe of exchangeable marble hair-don'ts. Along the way, the wayward writing and banal insights (wearing someone else's hair is a kind of plagiarism) begin to exert a certain charm, and the many colour illustrations are illuminating.

He really gets artist Cindy Sherman, who snapped herself in costume in non-places – hotel bedrooms, roadsides at night – in a series called *Untitled Film Stills*. In one of her works, "a messy hairstyle and a neorealist top is enough to give a glimpse of the turbulence of a whole life... the fragility of the fiction of the I".

If you want to consider "the wig as symbol", 18th-century France is your playground. Flour was used to whiten headpieces rather than feeding the poor; wigs reached heights of expensive absurdity until they were trimmed by the "national razor" (the guillotine). The Jacobins behind the Reign of Terror, instead of ditching the peruke, adopted natural colours and soberer styles, but the fashionable wig's days were numbered. The English slapped a tax on hair powder in 1795, French wig-makers' guilds were dissolved and the perruquiers redeployed as barbers. When will bewigged British barristers catch up?

Lucy R Fisher

★★★★★



Warm beer causes plague!

Mediæval responses to plague had a lot in common with how the world has tried to manage the Covid pandemic, says **Mark Greener**

Plagues, Pandemics and Viruses

From the Plague of Athens to Covid-19

Heather E Quinlan

Visible Ink Press 2020

Pb, 397pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781578597048

Lockdowns. Social distancing. Fake news. For all our medical sophistication, a mediæval physician would recognise our responses to Covid-19.

During the waves of plague that swept across Europe during the Middle Ages and Enlightenment, physicians used personal protective equipment, such as plague suits. When the Black Death reached Ragusa (Dubrovnik), the authorities introduced 30-day isolation and patrolled the borders. During the 1636 London plague, the Royal College of Physicians recommended banning public and private gatherings.

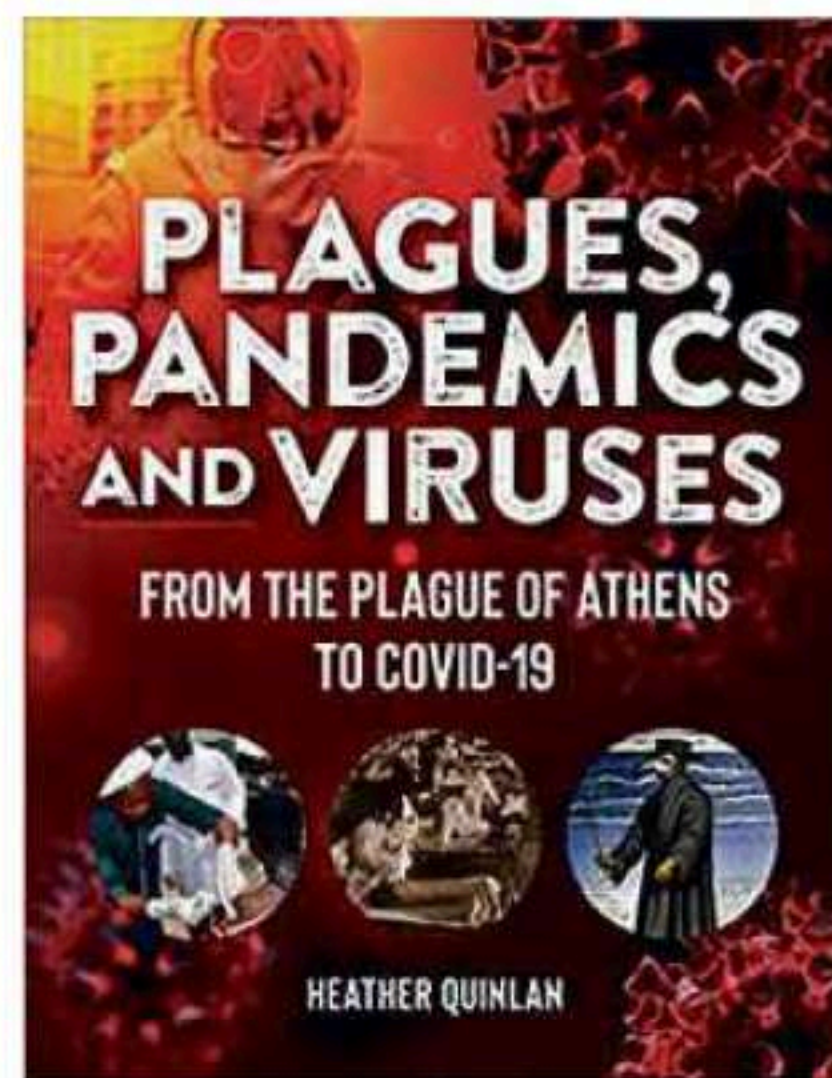
As the Treasury struggles with Covid-19's economic fallout, Quinlan recounts that a plague outbreak in AD541 brought the "near-collapse of the economic system" supporting the Byzantine Empire. Covid-19, like the London plague, tends to hit the poorest the hardest.

Fake news "plagued" previous pandemics. Some "experts" suggested that drinking beer in an overheated room or eating cucumbers caused the London plague. Some suggested avoiding boiled cauliflowers, peaches and sweet plums among other fruits and vegetables. Inevitably, some persecuted Jews for spreading the Black Death or regarded disease as divine punishment. In an excellent chapter summarising the US response to Covid-19, Quinlan tells of a US pastor who "described Christians who use hand sanitiser as having 'fake faith' and 'no balls'".

Fortean have seen it all before. Back in 1976 a mysterious outbreak at a Philadelphia

hotel led FT to comment that the response "is a classical scenario of clashing experts, contradictory theories, inefficiency, bungling, scaremongering and general ineffectiveness of the various kinds of establishments ... caught with their collective pants down by the unknown" (FT20:10-11). Over four decades later, it's, for me, a perfect encapsulation of the response to Covid-19. A Soviet paper even "speculated that a secret Pentagon chemical warfare experiment had gone wrong" in Philadelphia, shades of the blame placed on the Wuhan laboratory. We now know a bacterium caused the outbreak of "Legionnaires' disease". But the similarities with Covid-19 are striking.

Quinlan's easy-to-read, accessible and humane historical overview of humanity's struggle with pandemics resonates across the years and casts a wide net. She



covers, for instance, prescription opioid misuse and addiction. The chapter is excellent, sympathetic and the risks need highlighting. The discussion jarred a bit with the book's microbiological focus; but I understand and totally sympathise with her motives. I'd willingly sacrifice narrative focus to save a life or even a single case of addiction. Visible Ink should commission a book from Quinlan on opioid misuse and addiction: it could be excellent.

Her explanations are generally clear, concise and, given that she aims at a popular audience, accurate – even when she dis-

cusses immunology, a notoriously complex area of biology. Occasionally, however, I felt that the simplifications went a step too far. Discussing *Homo sapiens*'s early medical history, she notes that Palæolithic people were "the world's first pharmacists; herbs were discovered in Shanidar cave in today's Kurdistan". The remains are actually associated with *Homo neanderthalensis* not *H. sapiens*. I believe the herbs suggest the burial is that of a Neanderthal healer or patient. But Quinlan doesn't point out that the suggestion that the presence of the flowers was deliberate, let alone that the herbs were placed because they were medicinal, is controversial. (For an excellent summary of the excavations, see *Antiquity* 2020;94:11–26.)

She describes *Yersinia pestis*, the bacterium that causes plague, as being covered with "a layer called 'biofilm', which is really just a clinical term for slime; this slime prevents *Y. pestis* from being eaten by other cells". Biofilms certainly help *Y. pestis* evade immune defences. But biofilms are more than protective slime. They're complex, integrated microbiological communities that, for example, encourage *Y. pestis*'s transmission by fleas, drive the bacterium's growth, reproduction and disease-causing pathogenicity, and are central to the bacterium's ability to cope with environmental changes, such as resistance to our immune systems and antibiotics. Biofilms are an important reason why certain bacteria (not just *Y. pestis*) are so often deadly and increasingly difficult to treat.

It's hard to find the silver lining in the Covid-19 cloud. But plagues can force social change. Quinlan notes that an economic boom followed the Black Death. The limited number of workers increased wages, reduced rents and hastened the end of feudalism.

I just hope some good comes out of our current mess.

★★★★

Mystery Cats of the World Revisited

Blue Tigers, King Cheetahs, Black Cougars, Spotted Lions and More

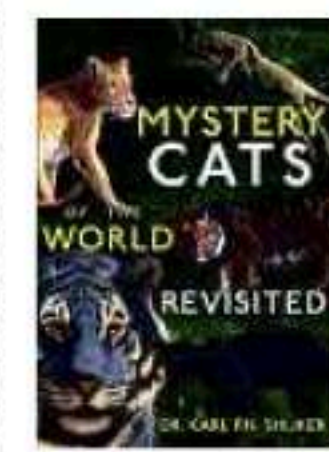
Karl PN Shuker

Anomalist Books 2020

Pb, 414pp, £19.95, ISBN 9781949501179

This is an updated and revised edition of Karl Shuker's 1989 work *Mystery Cats of the World: From Blue Tigers to Exmoor Beasts* – in his words, a chance to "incorporate exciting and compelling new data on mystery cats."

Interesting and informative, this is a meticulous look at the world of feline rarities and oddities, illustrated with black and white photographs throughout. Divided by continent, each section examines mystery cats then offers several possible explanations and theories



for reported sightings, including unusual felines that are escapees from zoos or collections, survivors from prehistory

or simple misidentifications.

For its size, the UK seems to have had more than its fair share of mystery cat sightings; notable cases examined include the infamous Surrey Puma, which attracted much media attention in the early 1960s. Shuker also considers, amongst others, King Cheetahs in Africa, Black Pumas in the Americas and Black Tigers in Asia. Many of the mystery cats mentioned seem to have unusual variations in the colouring or patterning of their fur; there is a useful chart detailing the genetics of cat coloration.

Throughout the book, Shuker's passion for the subject is clear. He has done much to promote interest in mystery cats, not only within the fortaen/cryptozoological communities but also within the framework of scientific orthodoxy. He raises some interesting points about the knowledge of ancient peoples and the fauna they lived alongside, now sadly lost to us. He also highlights the demise of many felid species due to overkill and ignorance by humans.

This is a good opportunity for us all to learn as much as we can about our felines, mysterious or not, before we lose some of them for good.

Sue Hardiman

★★★★



SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

DAVID V BARRETT ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION

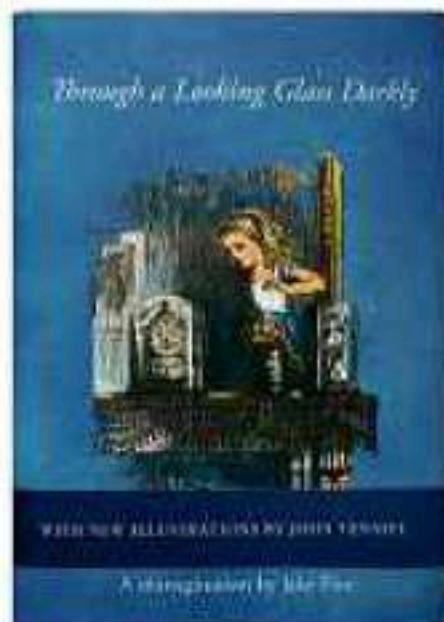
The Dark Side of Alice in Wonderland

Angela Youngman

Pen & Sword 2021

Hb, 185pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781526785817

The Victoria & Albert Museum's delightful exhibition *Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser* (see pp14-15) focuses on Alice and reinterpretations of her story, rather than on Lewis Carroll/Charles Dodgson himself, so we're spared yet another discussion of the morality of his photography. Unfortunately, that's not the case with Angela Youngman's book, which is unremittingly negative from beginning to end. Was Dodgson a paedophile? No; although it's unacceptable today, photographing children naked was quite normal in Victorian times. Or was he Jack the Ripper? That 15-page chapter could have been one very short word long. Do Alice and other characters exhibit traits of people with an assortment of present-day alphabet-soup psychological syndromes? By this point, frankly, who cares? With its ludicrously short resources page (just 19 books) and the skimpiest of indexes, this book takes unsourced superficiality to a new level. Avoid!



Through a Looking Glass Darkly

Jake FIOR

Alice Through the Looking Glass 2021

Hb, 178pp, £19.95, ISBN 9781527256903

Through a Looking Glass Darkly is a rewriting or "reimagining" of Lewis Carroll's second Alice novel. Author Jake Fior, who runs an Alice bookshop in London, has added an external framing narrative and made changes to the internal story, though he has retained much of the original text. Alice, a present-day teenage girl, buys a looking glass from a charity shop and, like Carroll's Alice, steps through it into the world of the Red and White Queens and Humpty Dumpty, where she has to confront and defeat the Jabberwocky – not knowing that the looking glass was once owned by

Aleister Crowley who, in a magical falling out with Golden Dawn founder McGregor Mathers, had trapped a demon inside it... The book is beautifully produced; a shame, then, that it is so poorly proof-read: there are not only typos but lines missing or out of place, absent page numbers, paragraphs not indented and in one case an illustration covering part of the text.

Aleister Crowley MI5

Richard C McNeff

Mandrake of Oxford 2021

Pb, 206pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781914153020

Aleister Crowley MI5 is a revised reprint of Richard C McNeff's 2004 novel *Sybarite among the*

Shadows. It covers a day and a night in the life of Crowley's former disciple Victor Neuburg and his encounters with various artistic luminaries of 1936 London, mainly in pubs and clubs around Fitzrovia – including the

Wheatsheaf on Rathbone Place, home to the Sohemians pub meeting, frequented by many fortune-tellers pre-pandemic.

Neuburg meets up with Dylan Thomas, Augustus John, Wyndham Lewis and many others, including gossip columnist and future MP Tom Driberg and "Queen of Fitzrovia" Nina Hammett, whom Crowley had unsuccessfully sued for libel. Crowley's spectre hovers over nearly every conversation, though he only arrives in the story halfway through (apart from a fleeting appearance in drag at a Surrealist exhibition off Savile Row, where Salvador Dalí delivered a lecture wearing a deep sea diving suit). Once Crowley appears, though, he takes centre stage, with clandestine meetings with one Captain King (actually senior MI5 officer, naturalist and broadcaster Maxwell Knight, who inspired Ian Fleming's M) and drinks in a late-night bar with Wallis Simpson and a hen-pecked Edward VIII...

Brilliantly researched, this is an astonishing read, a 24-hour snap-

shot of the seedy underground life of artists, poets, prostitutes, spies and royalty of mid-Thirties London, all revolving around the fading powerhouse ("make-up could not disguise how... the skin had sagged and grown pitted") that was the Great Beast.

Notes from Small Planets

Nate Crowley

HarperVoyager 2020

Hb, 253pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780008306861

Notes from Small Planets by Nate Crowley (probably no relation!) claims to be "your pocket travel guide to the worlds of science fiction and fantasy". It's (in its own words) a "parody guidebook" that plays with the archetypes and clichés of the genres. Fine, and amusing enough – but this was done (and done so much better) 25 years ago by Diana Wynne Jones in her *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*.

The Book of Darryl

The Goggles & Matthew Bate

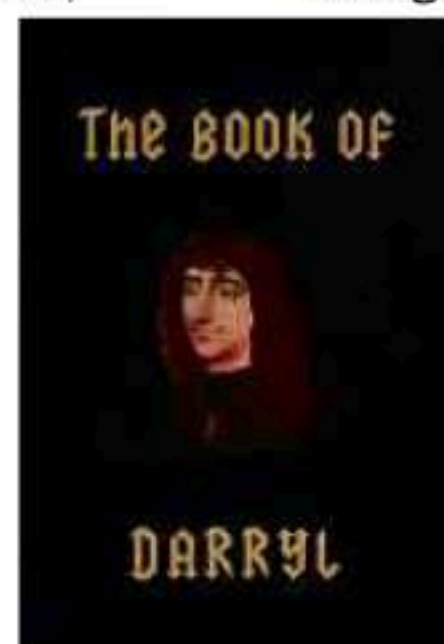
Farrar, Strauss & Giroux 2021

Hb, 165pp, £20.99, ISBN 9780374115319

Darryl is a 16-year-old living in a grotty suburb of Roman-occupied Nazareth 2,000 years ago – but though people wear robes, there

are mobile phones, TVs and skateboards. He's one of those kids who gets bullied, at least when other kids even notice him. His life changes when a teenager called Jay moves in next door. Together with a couple of other kids, Jude

(who hates Jay) and Mary, they form a heavy metal band, Iron Messiah. The book has the best crucifixion gag I've seen since *The Life of Brian*. The band are playing at crucifixions: "Darryl found them unfulfilling at best, uncomfortable at worst – what if it was someone they knew?" *The Book of Darryl* is a weird mixture, which somehow really works – but there's an additional app that's a complete waste of time. You download it, then point your phone at any of the pictures in the book and animated versions of them appear on your phone.



Unlike a comic where the images and text are integrated, this means stopping reading to point your phone at a picture.

The Ethereal Transit Society

Thomas Vaughn

Bad Dream Entertainment 2020

Pb, 131pp, £9.99, ISBN 9780996038195

Imagine what it must have been like for the few true believers who didn't die in the Heaven's Gate "UFO cult" suicides. In *The Ethereal Transit Society*, clearly inspired by that event and the beliefs behind it, three survivors of a similar group follow a cosmic signal to the grave of their founder in deepest Arkansas, on his instructions, to complete his work, preparing for the End Times. It's a strange story, becoming more and more so as spiritual and/or celestial powers begin to make themselves manifest apocalyptically... Thomas Vaughn's debut novel is very short, but surprisingly powerful.

The Mechanical Maestro

Emily Owen

SilverWood Books 2020

Pb, 320pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781781329672

Let's finish with Emily Owen's *The Mechanical Maestro*, a splendid mid-Victorian story of a couple of young watch-making brothers who create a clockwork figure which can not only learn and play any music on any instrument, but can compose its own. Inevitably Maestro, who has developed consciousness, is exploited as a music hall marvel; is chased after by other, more second-rate, inventors who want to discover how he works; and is campaigned against by a preacher who sees him as an affront to God's creation. And then Maestro sees a petite, silvery female automaton singing, and falls head over heels for her – but is she all that she seems? The brothers' teenage sister is a botanical genius, creating weird and wonderful versions of plants which have their own vital part to play in the story. This is a fun romp, beautifully told, with plenty of lessons about humanity's less pleasant characteristics.

In Jodorowsky country

This much-praised combination of acid Western, folk horror and anti-religious arthouse parable was described by its director as “an atmospheric Jodorowskian trip” – but does it work?



Luz: The Flower of Evil

Dir Juan Diego Escobar Alzate,
Mexico/Colombia, 2019
On digital 26 July; Blu-ray 23 August

A heady brew of acid Western, folklore, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Terrence Malick, *Luz* is unlike anything else you'll see this year.

In an unspecified time and place, Señor (Conrado Osorio) is the leader of a small, devoutly religious mountain community where he rules the roost in much the same way a cult leader dominates his disciples. He lives with his daughter Uma (Yuri Vargas), two young women he has taken in – Laila (Andrea Esquivel) and Zion (Sharon Guzman) – and sundry other losers and drifters. He is mourning the recent death of his wife, the titular Luz, and perhaps in reaction to that has promised his community that soon the Messiah will come, reborn as a child, to absolve them of their sins. Naturally, the struggle between repression, be it patriarchal, religious, or sexual, and a desire for individuality leads to conflicts of the most cruel and bloody kind.

The first thing to say is that despite the way in which the film has been marketed, it

Despite the way it has been marketed, it isn't a horror film

isn't a horror film, at least not in the sense that Hammer or Amicus would understand the term. Yes, it has horrific moments, is frequently repellent and dispiriting, and has an atmosphere of constant dread, but then so does *Schindler's List*. I don't think it serves a film well, especially one as singular as this, to try to pigeonhole it. Genre theory is fine, but sometimes a film doesn't fit into any category.

If not horror then, what is it? The aforementioned Jodorowsky and Malick are obvious reference points. The combination of those two directors' styles could lead to pretentiousness and wilful obscurantism, and at times it does, but the themes are clear. Malick's reverence for the natural world and despair at man's intrusion into it is there in the achingly beautiful location photography, shot in such a way as to heighten the sense of wonder. Jodorowsky's preoccupations – sex, religion and death – are present, as is

his commitment to shocking the viewer. Director Alzate has been up-front about his admiration for Jodorowsky and has said that *Luz* is full of references to his work.

All of which is fine and dandy, but does it work? To a degree, yes. The contrast between light and dark, interiors and exteriors, the colourful and the drab, is all done supremely well. Alzate has complete command of technique, and *Luz* feels organic – the seams between the various elements never show. He has some big things to say about big topics and skewers hypocritical religious attitudes brilliantly. Señor never takes responsibility for his own actions, instead ascribing them to the work of the Devil. Like all fanatics, he believes he has the answers to everything, but actually knows nothing; his words are empty rhetoric.

However, the film is slow, individual scenes take too long to resolve, and at times it is a chore to sit through. Most of the script is the demented ramblings of a maniac, which doesn't make for great cinema. There are a lot of meaningless voiceovers in the Malick-approved style, which strive for profundity but fail. Nobody talks or acts like a real human being, which I suppose is reasonable enough if you take the film to be an anti-religious parable, but it has a distancing effect; you're aware the film is a stylised fiction, so it's difficult to really care for the characters. It's a bit like how I imagine attending one of those American evangelical services you see on TV must be like: spending 104 minutes in the company of naïve and credulous morons, while being ranted at by a religious fanatic. Nevertheless, I can cautiously recommend *Luz*, largely because of the photography and its sheer oddity; just don't expect a horror film.

Daniel King



The Dark and the Wicked

Dir Bryan Bertino, USA 2020
On Blu-ray, DVD and digital from 5 July

Siblings Louise and Michael (Marin Ireland and Michael Abbott Jr) return to their parents' remote farm when they hear that their father is gravely ill. Something is clearly wrong: their mother is acting oddly and warns them to leave. They start having terrifying hallucinations, and then mum does something which is as shocking as it is gruesome. As incidents pile up, they learn an evil spirit is trying to possess their dying father and steal his soul.

This is an intriguing horror film that contrasts the ordinariness of its characters and setting with the extraordinary events in which they are caught up. It's like a Sam Shepard play mixed with films like *Insidious* and *Hereditary*. Okay, there's a lot of monosyllabic mumbling and staring off into the distance, but director Bertino at least grounds his characters in a recognisable reality.

As the film progresses and the bodies start piling up, things begin to unravel. In the first half Bertino relies on an unsettling atmosphere interrupted by the odd jump scare. In the second, there's too much gore and the previously sensible characters start behaving stupidly. All that has been done to build the tension is wasted as the film degenerates into set pieces. Very few horror films manage to sustain themselves for the full running time, so you shouldn't hold that against it, and the attempt to go down a slightly different path is to be applauded. The acting is good, the script free from howlers, and the photography fine: it's a good effort and a very watchable film.

Daniel King





TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



The UnXplained With William Shatner

History Channel / Blaze

There's something about *Star Trek* actors. From Leonard Nimoy hosting *In Search Of...* in the 1970s to Jonathan Frakes fronting the rather more febrile 1995 Fox *Alien Autopsy Special*, Roddenberry's children possess a quality that lends itself to fortean-themed TV presenting. Despite his relatively late start, William Shatner has put in a strong showing in recent years first with *The UnXplained With William Shatner* and then *Weird Or What? With William Shatner*. Note the recurring theme in the

titles. Shatner is a draw. These programmes tend to just let him do his thing: equally, none of them mentions the anomaly that is his hairpiece, maybe as a professional courtesy.

Here, he is very much the host, linking segments and talking quizzically in a black studio with animated backdrops. Each episode follows a loosely defined theme. In the series one episode 'Mysterious Stones',

None of them mentions the anomaly that is Shatner's hairpiece

the net is spread quite wide, managing to incorporate topics from Mecca to crystal skulls, all narrated with Shatner's trademark delivery, reminiscent of a small child reading words back as he writes them ("Set... INTO the Kaaaa-baa. A BLACK! Stone..."). The crystal skull segment focuses on the Mitchell-Hedges example (Mitchell-Hedges being the name of its discoverer, not a defunct cigarette brand that sponsored crystal skulls in the manner of 1970s F1 racing cars). For those of a certain age, said skull will always be associated with *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World*.

In 'Vampires & Werewolves' Shatner toddles towards the camera, frequently looking over his shoulder as Max Schreck looms bitily behind him on the big screen, and asks if the reason for our fascination is "because they're part... human???" and whether

their "gruesome urges LURK!" – dramatic wheel to stare at sepia graveyard graphic – "... inside of us???"

Gruesome urges aside, Shatner boldly touches on all the usual suspects – Vlad Tepes, Comte St Germain, Skinwalkers, and something he calls "The Beast of Jay-voo-Dane" (or Gévaudan if you prefer). He also has a chat with a modern day, 'sanguine vampire' dressed less like Bela Lugosi than a roadie for the Grateful Dead.

The programmes never really reach any obvious conclusion, or indeed destination, but do prove the adage that the journey is often at least as enjoyable – and are none the worse for that. There are far more po-faced fortean series out there, but this one ticks some paranormal-primer boxes and romps along nicely, particularly with Captain Kirk as your tour guide. Ahead, Warp Factor One!

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

We have quite the fortean cocktail this month, starting with *Unearth* (on digital platforms), where a family of cash-strapped farmers reluctantly let corporate America frack on their land. Rather than release new funds, the drilling unleashes a dormant pathogen instead. Eventually, the locals are sprouting roots and screaming a lot. This might be billed as a horror movie (genre icon Adrienne Barbeau leads the cast) but there is no scary stuff until the last 20 minutes, which may put off some viewers. Yet if you're willing to see the truly frightening and unfair ways corporations treat farmers, you might find it's an effective horror movie throughout, after all – it's certainly a depressing one.

I saw the cover of *Witch Hunt* (on digital platforms) and assumed it was just another rip-off of *The Craft*. It's not. This high-concept thriller owes more to *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Crucible*. The setting is modern America, where witches are methodically hunted by the BWI (Bureau of Witch Investigations). Martha Goode runs a safe house smuggling witches into Mexico – which is offering asylum – but the stakes are raised when her daughter starts showing powers of her own. This OK exploration of American power and prejudice will particularly appeal to teens worried about being different.

Next it's the ground-breaking *Encounters of the Spooky Kind*, (Eureka, £17.99) which combined comedy, horror, slapstick, Chinese folklore and

A homicidal piano that's filled with pilgrim ghosts and aristocratic demons

kick-ass Kung-fu to create a new, and somehow coherent, genre of its own. It's hilarious, but weird and creepy too.

From bouncing vampires to German expressionism with *The Hands of Orlac* (Eureka, £16.99), the unsettling tale of a concert pianist mutilated in a train crash. When he learns his hands have been replaced by those of an executed murder, his mind starts to disintegrate. Conrad Veidt is stunning as Orlac, who slips into wild and frightening madness without a sound. His intense, wide-eyed stares (and a disturbing control over his temple veins) speak loudly enough.

The thrills are less sophisticated (but a lot more fun) in Arrow Video's *Weird*

Wisconsin box set (£59.99), which showcases six films by the America indie director Bill Rebane. Space forces me to pick my two favourites. *The Alpha Incident* is like a community theatre version of sci-fi classic *The Andromeda Strain*, where a leaked alien virus forces a small group to quarantine in a train station. Apart from a slowly bursting head (complete with gross eye-pop), there's not much 'action' in this, but the claustrophobic story of a virus-induced lockdown touched some surprisingly relevant nerves as I watched. *The Demons of Ludlow* features a town gifted with a haunted piano that's filled with homicidal pilgrim ghosts and aristocratic demons. It's super-cheap and seriously kitsch, and it certainly lacks the style and polish of its clearest inspiration (fellow cursed-town movie, *The Fog*). But the unfolding mystery is ambitious and there are creepy sights for the patient viewer.



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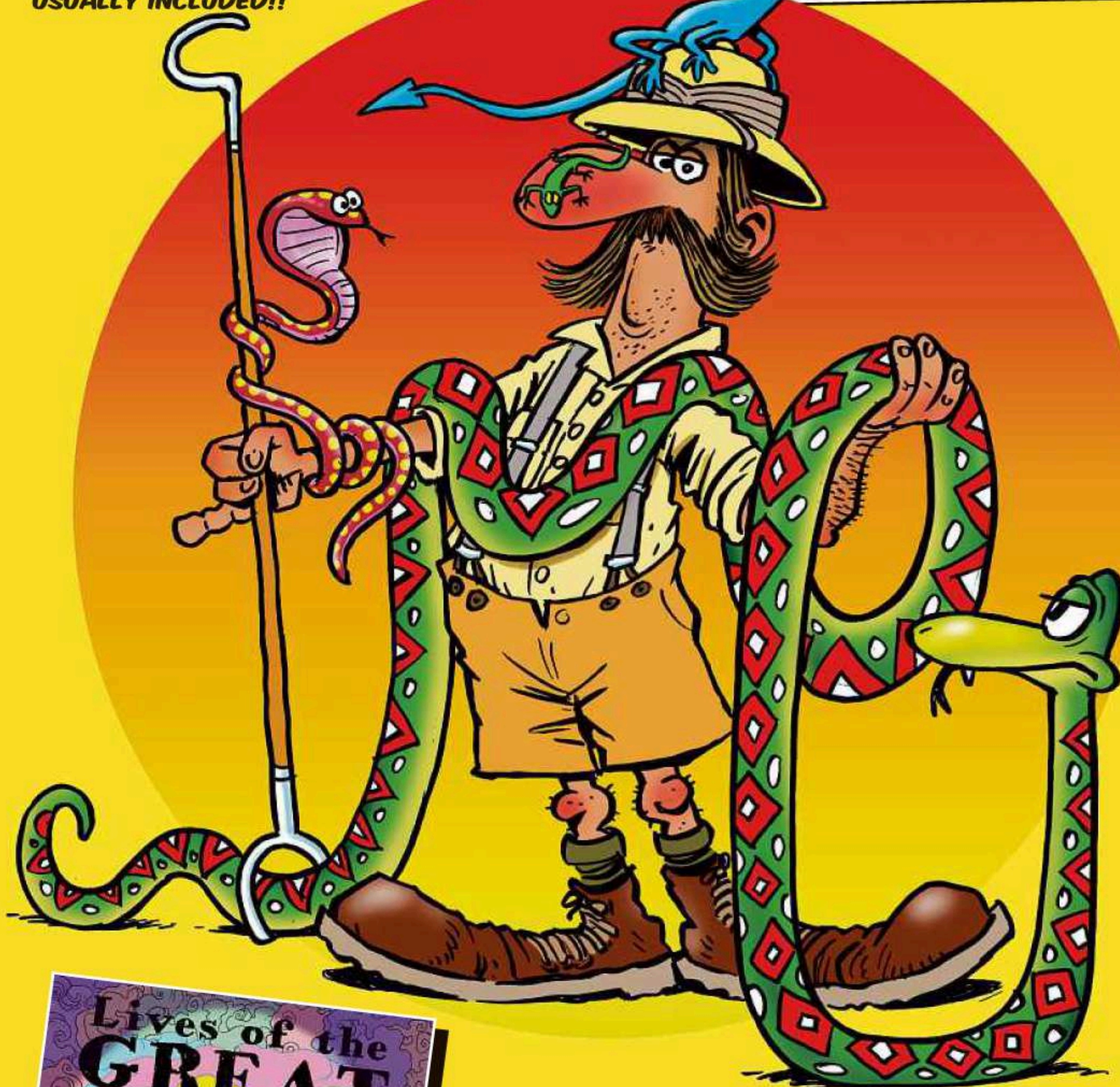


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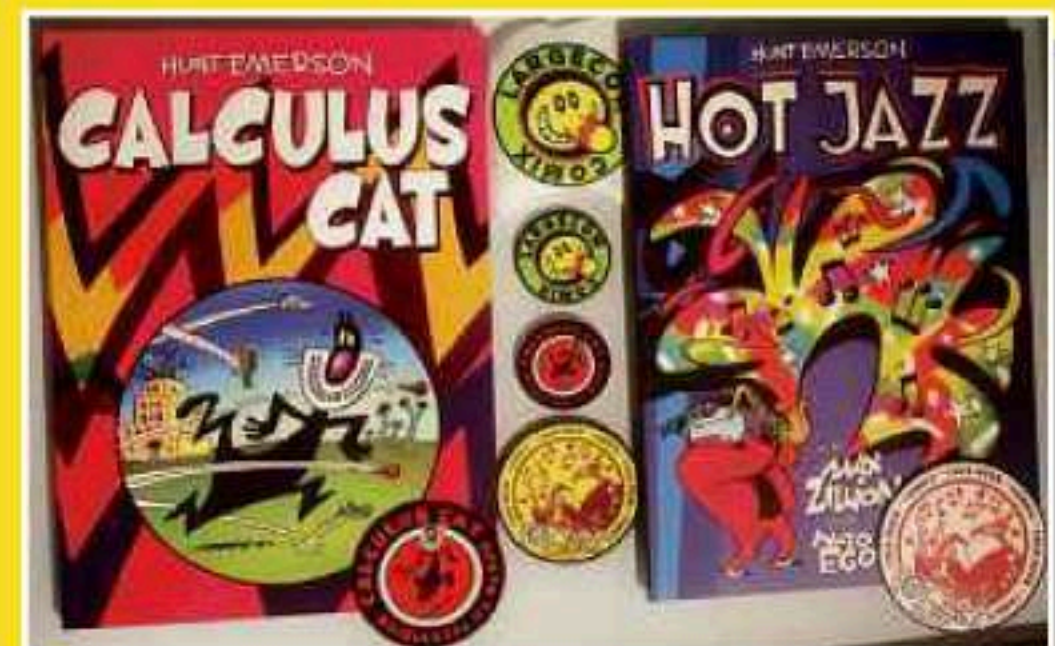
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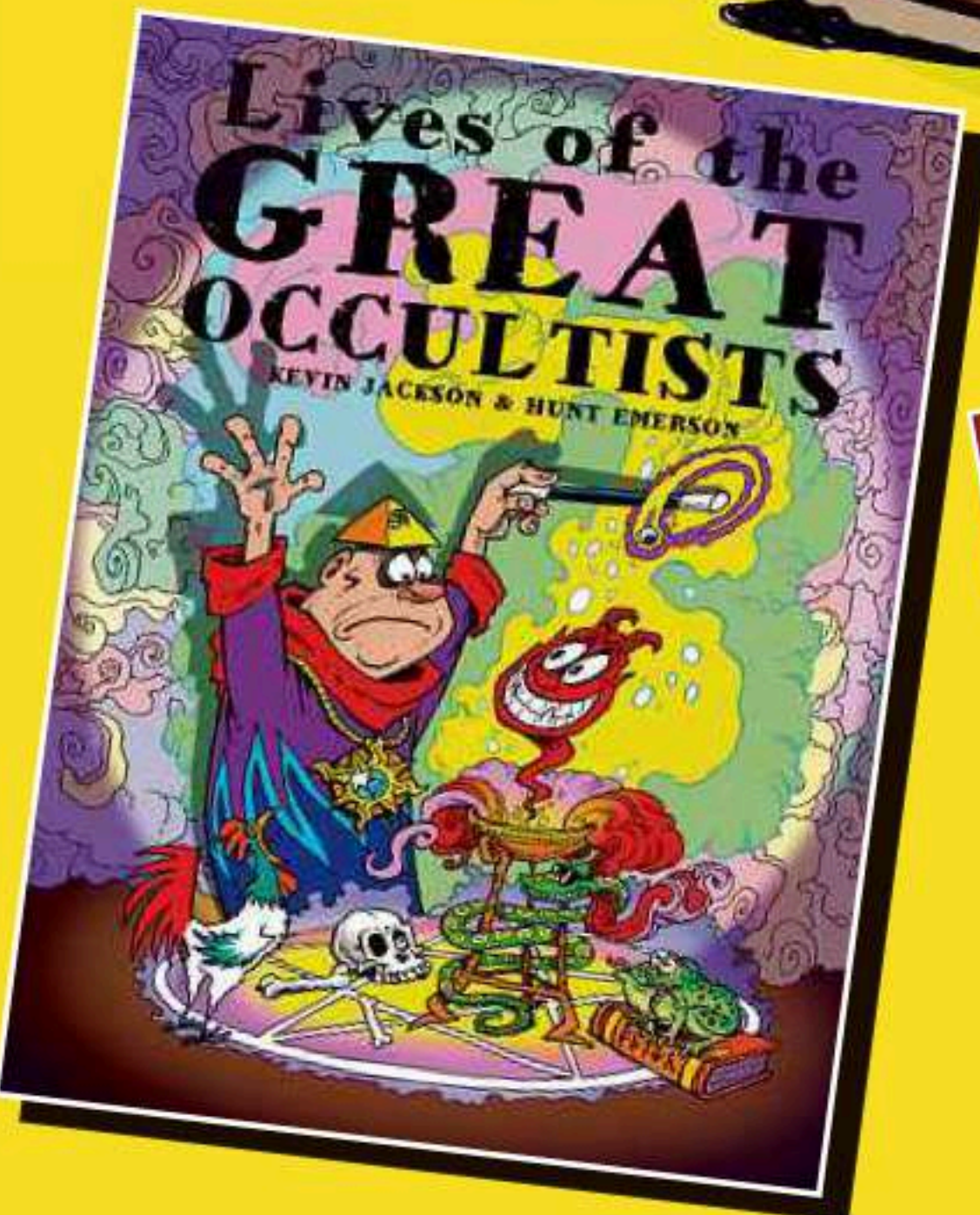
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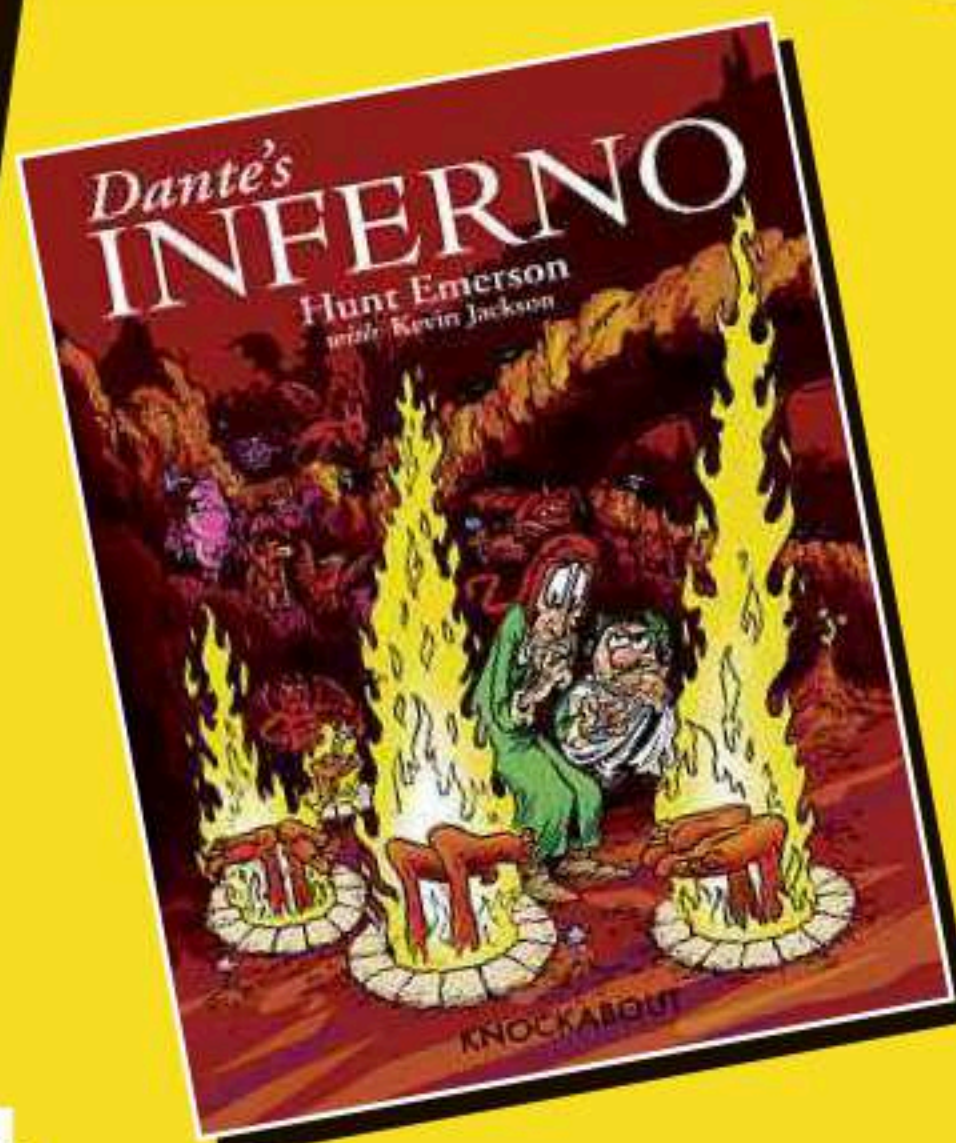
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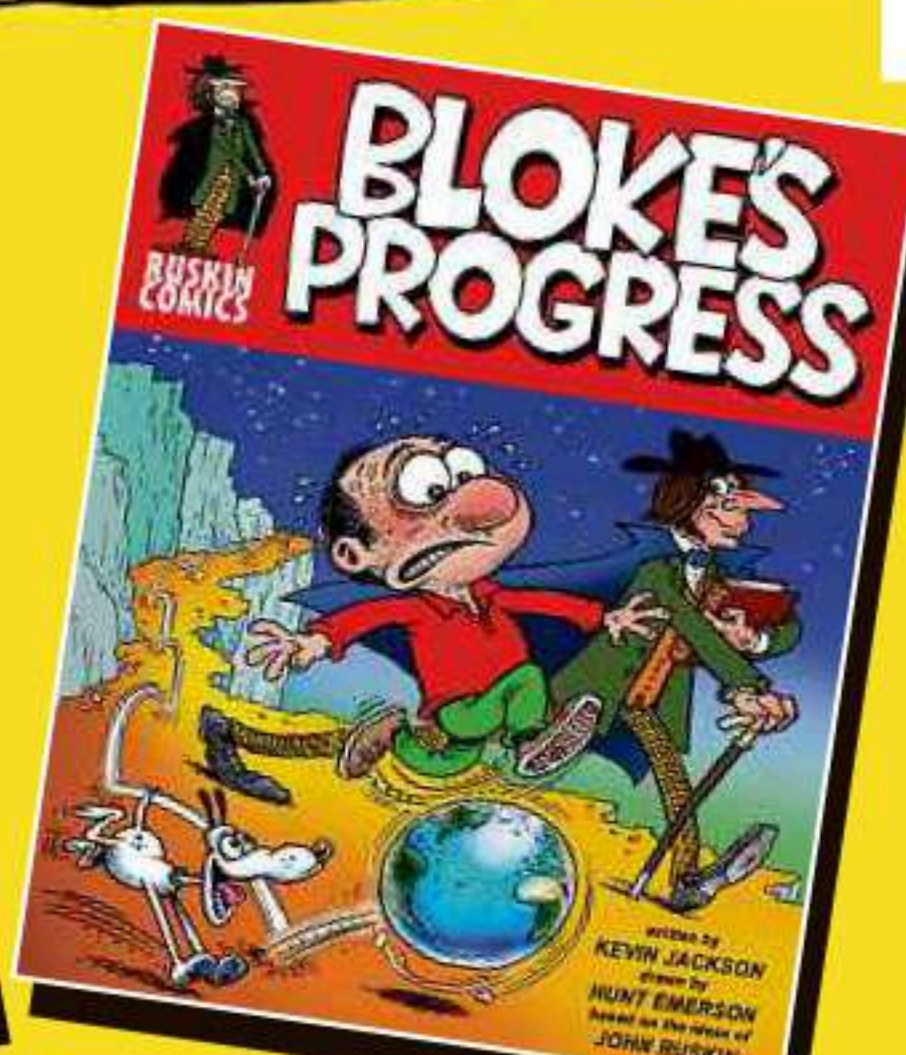
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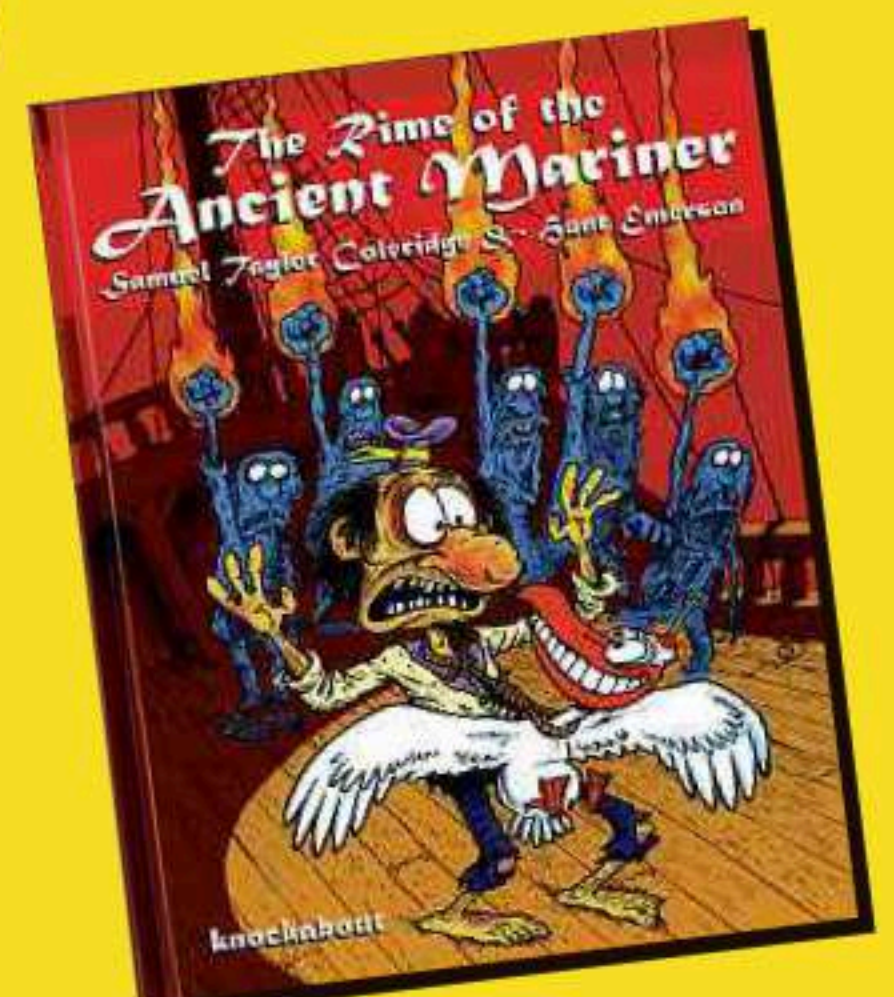
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Protecting Bigfoot

Regarding 'Hunting Bigfoot', in "Creatures on the Loose" [FT405:26]: adopting Justin Humphrey's position on the reality of Bigfoot, surely one would be required to establish its nature before designating it a suitable subject for the huntsman. If it is a remnant of an ancient Homo (no jokes, please) species, then surely it must be off-limits. If it is anything else, such as an unknown or hybrid bear or primate, then I firmly believe it should still be off-limits. I have read about Victorian explorers sighting rare animals and promptly shooting them. I'm not sure how much truth there is in these accounts, but I feel the last thing we should be doing is resurrecting this behaviour. As it says in the limerick 'The Bigfoot Hunter' (wot I wrote):

*A creature came out of the mist,
And he grabbed me quite hard
by the wrist.
He said, "Listen to me:
I will let you go free,
If you say that we just don't
exist."*


• I enjoyed 'Don't Forget The Y-Files' by Jenny Randles [FT405:29] and her point that investigators "have a duty of care" to the witnesses. This prompts me to make a point about the supposedly dismissive comments sometimes attributed to experts. For example, sometimes an astronomer will suggest the aerial wotnot could have been the planet Venus, or a meteorologist will suggest a weather phenomenon, whereas the witness's description would appear to discount this. The point is that if you consult an expert, you are asking for an answer based on their area of expertise, so it seems somewhat unfair to denigrate them. We should have a duty of care to the experts, too.


Dave Miles
By email

Plath and Ouija

Re the feature on a poem derived from Ouija board sessions [FT405:40-47]: Sylvia Plath was

SIMULACRA CORNER





Duncan Foy photographed this 'petrified dog' on the Greek island of Zakynthos.

Lee Scudder noticed this apparent cat's face on cliffs in the Baranca Binigaus gorge, near Santa Thomas in Menorca. The photograph was taken from the western side of the valley.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteanimes.com.

a Ouija fan. In the Notes section of the Faber and Faber *Sylvia Plath: Collected Poems*, there is "Dialogue over a Ouija Board: A verse Dialogue". This was never intended for public consumption as poetry, more as a personal amusement, but was based on an actual Ouija session. A highlight of this piece of her Juvenilia runs as follows:

"Sybil: Where do you live?
Leroy: He starts, As if blood-hounds bore him down." The Spirit then spells out "In Core of Nerve", which is a surprisingly humanistic thing for a disembodied spirit to say, and maybe that was the point. Some Ouija enthusiasts, after all, believed themselves to be merely contacting their own subconscious. The Notes say that the spirit contacted, named "Pan", once scored a phenomenal hit with a Littlewood's football coupon, and "predicted all thirteen of the draws made on the follow-

ing Saturday" but his "later attempts were progressively less accurate and very soon no better than anyone else's... Usually his communications were gloomy and macabre, but not without wit."

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Quatermass and the polt

What better way to spend a wet May bank holiday than watching the old black & white BBC TV series of *Quatermass and the Pit*, originally transmitted by BBC Television in December 1958 and January 1959?

The story involves workmen deep in the London Underground unearthing a strange skull and what at first appears to be a wartime unexploded bomb. Professor Quatermass (André Morell) gets involved in the investigation

when it becomes apparent that the object is an alien spacecraft. The ship and its contents have a powerful and malignant influence over those who come into contact with them, including Quatermass. It becomes obvious to him that the aliens, probably Martians, had been abducting early humans and modifying them to give them psychic abilities, much like their own, before returning them to Earth.

In the series, this malignant influence manifests itself as a poltergeist, affecting the workmen and nearby houses. The second episode, entitled 'The Ghosts', was broadcast on 29 December 1958. Making enquiries with residents living near to where the spacecraft had been unearthed, Quatermass asks them what they had experienced: "Dreadful sounds. The people couldn't stay in that house... There was – sort of tapping and knocking. Like some person wanting to come in... And things would move, all by themselves – chairs and tables and ornaments – even the beds was moved about! They used to come every day. Reporters. What had I heard – what had I seen? They didn't believe us really...". (*Quatermass and the Pit*, Nigel Kneale, Penguin Books 1960, pp57-58)

This episode of *Quatermass* made me think about the recent feature on the Battersea Poltergeist [FT404:24-36]. Only two years before *Quatermass and the Pit* was broadcast, the Hitchings family of Battersea were terrorised by a poltergeist outbreak and the house was besieged by the national press. The FT article, the recent BBC Radio 4 docudrama on the case starring Toby Jones, and *The Poltergeist Prince of London* by Shirley Hitchings & James Clark (History Press, 2013) document how the family became reluctant media stars, ending up vilified by the press.

As I sat watching *Quatermass*, I wondered if Kneale had been aware of the high-profile London poltergeist case, which had occurred only two years before.

David Taylor
Halesowen, West Midlands

LETTERS

Maud's Elm

As I have a fascination with tree stories, I was most interested in Jan Bondeson's 'The Mystery of Maud's Elm' [FT406:44-48]. When the poor old tree was finally cut down, did no one think to remove the stump and see if there were any human bones beneath, thus verifying the legend? Was there a dig, by a local antiquarian perhaps, but with embarrassingly negative results hushed up? Or has it been a case of letting sleeping dogs lie, allowing the story, if not the tree, to live on?

Arthur Burton
Maidstone, Kent

Jan Bondeson replies:

At the time, the brief notices in the local papers made no mention of any excavation of the area around the stump. The traditionalists might have hoped that the pelvis, spinal column and skull might have survived, depending on when Maud was buried at the

crossroads. Had there been an investigation, the rationalists would have pooh-poohed the finding of skeletal remains, presuming that some tramp had been buried at the site many years ago. Had no remains been found, the traditionalists might have raised the possibility of Maud's corpse being unearthed and eaten by foxes and badgers.

Virtual future

I liked Jenny Randles's optimistic piece about how the move to increased online interaction/media during lockdown could be harnessed by fortune tellers and ridden into the future [FT406:31]. Related to this, I was recently able to attend the fantastic Megalithomania online conference, having never attended before due to the tyranny of distance (Formby to Glastonbury) and my own disorganisation. The conference was markedly fortune teller, covering the

whole spectrum from prominent mainstream archaeology to the art of Cymroglyphics (translating hieroglyphs using the Welsh language).

I think there will always be an undoubted appeal for people to occupy the same physical space, but the virtual world does open up the opportunities for more people to be involved in and access the content, while expanding the community, its scope and possibilities.

Daniel Clay
Formby, Merseyside

Shroud provenance

Clive Prince states that Leonardo da Vinci faked the Turin Shroud as though it were proven fact [FT404:38]. The Shroud has provenance since 1354 and Leonardo was born in 1458, 104 years later, so how can he have forged it?

Ray Stephenson
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

Editor's note: The books by Lynn Picknett & Clive Prince – Turin Shroud: In Whose Image? revised as Turin Shroud: How Leonardo da Vinci fooled History – cast doubt on the 14th century references to the Shroud, suggesting it was not the same artefact as the current relic. There is a remarkable resemblance between the disputed Leonardo painting known as the Salvator Mundi and the Shroud image; make of that what you will. The provenance and nature of the Shroud have been endlessly raked over, and life is too short to rehearse the various arguments every time the topic comes up. However, maybe a footnote was called for in this instance.

Dangerous sneezing

Regarding the report on 'photo-sneeze', light-related sneezing [FT406:28]: in the early 1980s, when I was in my 20s, I was interested in learning about genetics. I borrowed a book by someone called MacCormack – was it MacCormack's Atlas? Anyway, it was a vast tome that I believe was considered very important – if not definitive – at the time. I

recall one of the stranger genes described, which caused its possessors to sneeze when they went into strong sunlight. The text mentioned how this might make driving a car (actually) difficult and (potentially) dangerous – think driving in and out of dappled sunlight. The person with the light/sneeze gene would be constantly sneezing, to an extent that would obviously make their driving hazardous.

Jane Dyer
Cardiff

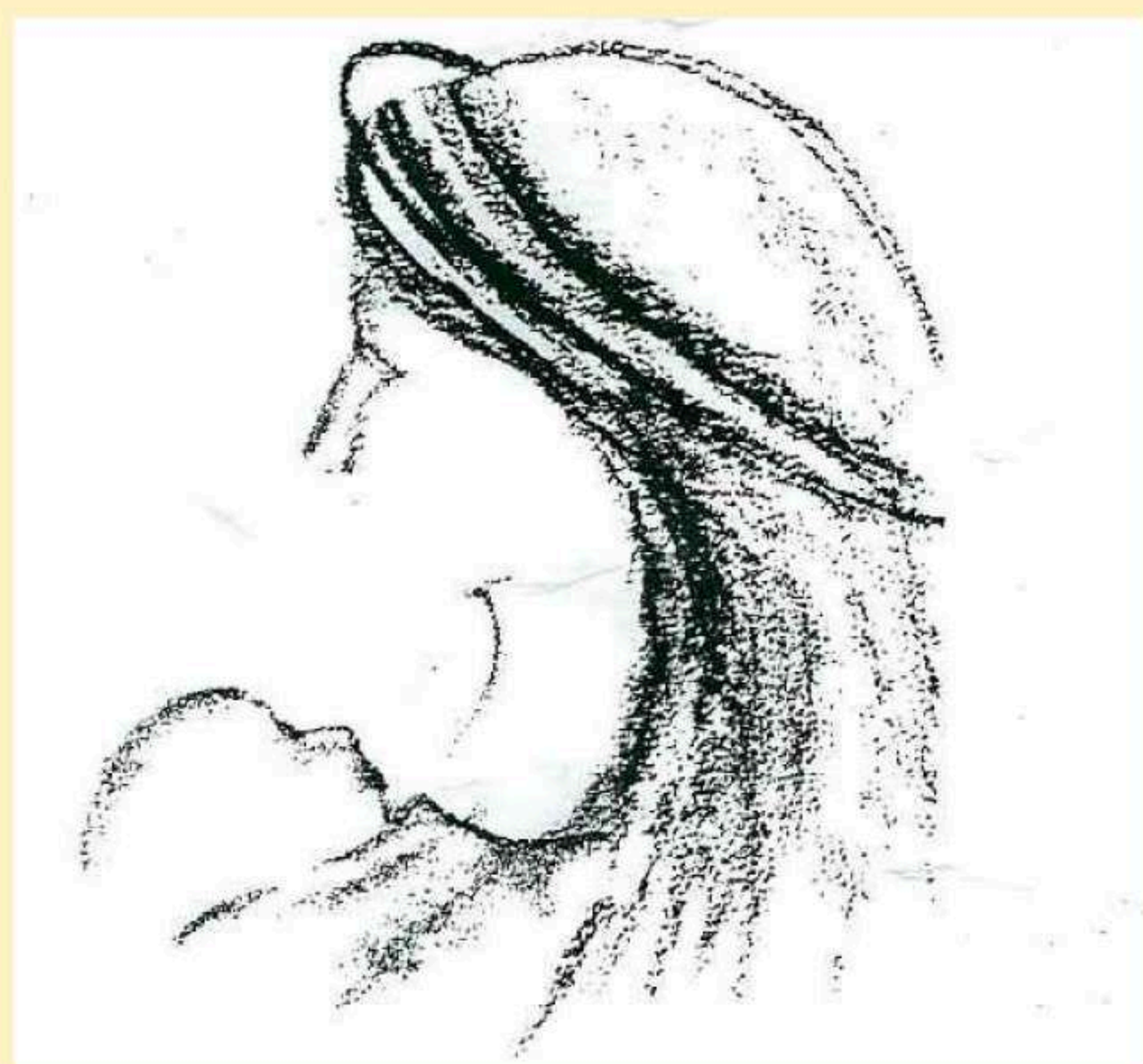
To me, photosneeze sounds like a form of synaesthesia, where senses get mixed up with each other – even the gustatory form sounds like this. I have experienced the former as a strange sensation in the corner of the eye, near the tear duct, that then leads to the sneezing fit – and even that has a similar irritation as to when you try pulling hairs out of your nostrils (the curse of old age and rampant hair follicles in the nose and also sticking out of your ears).

Tony Sandy
By email

Cat person

Neil Oram delivers an evocative account of his confrontation with a 'cat-person' [FT406:74]. He asserts that he "knew what it was" but does not share his insight. A cat owner/servant myself, I am regularly scrutinised with avid impatience as I open cans and pouches, fill bowls with food and drink and do duty as doorkeeper for his comings and goings, thus meeting his needs with what he clearly views as enviable practical dexterity. Many domesticated cats surely experience frustration at having to wait upon the convenience of often absent and preoccupied humans and wish they could more speedily operate the service for themselves.

According to the Many-Worlds theory arising from the work of quantum physicist Hugh Everett III, Schrödinger's cat is both alive and dead, having called into being a discrete alternative world to accommodate his continuance. In this perspective, the energy generated by



Virgin and child

During the early 1980s my mother knew two hermits who lived in a caravan in the vicinity of a hermitage near Wolverton Manor on the Isle of Wight. They passed on this drawing to my mother. It shows an image of the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus that spontaneously appeared and remained for two months on the ceiling of the hermitage. In religious parlance, this is an *acheiropoieton*, a simulacrum "made without hands".

Richard Muirhead By email



Not the Blessed Virgin

This is a photo of my grandparents taken from the front of their house in Formby, Merseyside, in 1976. When I recently noticed what appears to be a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the garden over the road, I asked my mother how long it had been there. I was surprised to learn that there had never been such a statue in that garden, and



that this is just sunlight on a tree. My grandmother (named Mary) had been raised a Catholic, but fell out with members of her family for marrying outside the faith. I note the coincidence of this image appearing over her shoulder, opposite her Protestant husband.

Rob Bray

Old Stratford, Northamp-



an unmet need or unrealised possibility must become manifest somewhere. At each forking path in a decision-making process a replicated self embarks upon the alternative outcome to the one initially chosen. This results in a variety of outcomes and outcomes of outcomes, each occupying an alternative world.

At any point where an affinity arises (by accident or design) between 'this' world and an alternative one, a portal is likely to open and admit input from the (from our viewpoint) divergent reality, resulting in various anomalies, including appearances of entities from alternative developmental continua. Beings with the necessary degree of dimensional compatibility might take up semi-permanent residence as big cats, black dogs, loch monsters, Bigfoot, etc., but at the cost of isolating themselves and using shape-shifting camouflage. Unexplained human disappearances might be due to a two-way traffic flow. The "invisible steady intense air pressure" in Neil Oram's account suggests a dimensional shift resulting in a crossover.

Could cats' impatience with their inability to develop human-like efficiency branch into the forking path of an alternative reality where they have mutated into five-foot tall, five-fingered, opposing-thumbbed, feline humans? Or where humans, envious of the sagacious indolence of cats, have morphed into human

felines? It seems significant that this specimen boasted human hands and held them up for an entire "20 seconds", as if for display. As it "glide-walked" across the borderline between worlds, was it equally astonished to see a non-humanised feline and two non-felinised humans? And could the 'affinity' that connected the two 'worlds' have arisen from the facts that Neil Oram lives beside Loch Ness, that his play cycle then in performance was called *The Warp*, and that Maria's cat was present?

Harman Dickson

Littleover, Derby

Cottingley time warp

Simon Young's seemingly exasperated account [FT403:29] of witnesses who appear incapable of distinguishing between insects and fairies made me check it wasn't April Fool's Day. To my relief, however, I had not succumbed to a time-slip; Mr Young, apparently, simply had his tongue firmly in his cheek. However, his analysis was not entirely without time-slip value. His scepticism was clearly evident and would have some validity if he had been writing during the first incarnation of the Fairy Investigation Society, when it was *de rigueur* to portray The Otherfolk as supernatural versions of insects, dragonflies, honeybees, butterflies, hummingbirds, Tom

Thumb lookalikes, or any variety of gauze-like creatures that a fertile imagination could summon into existence. If we are to have a serious and genuinely fortean debate today about fairies, we need to move beyond the narrow Victorian-influenced Theosophical model of the inter-war years.

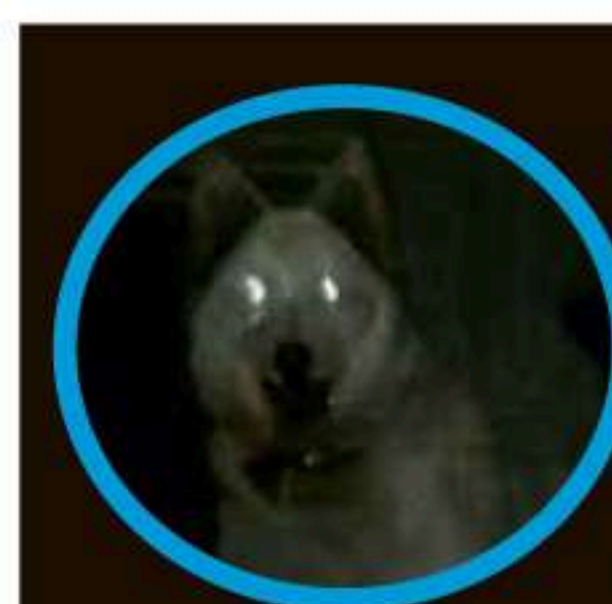
More modern studies into the nature of human psychology reveal that witnesses, rather than promptly and automatically assuming a paranormal explanation when faced with high-strangeness, tend to interpret what they are seeing in the most prosaic terms possible. It is only when what is being witnessed does not neatly and sensibly conform to a mundane expectation that the alternative possibility of a paranormal one is grudgingly invoked at all.

Having myself spoken to one or two witnesses who have encountered the paranormal – witnesses with no previous interest or understanding of the Weird and Wonderful – the response is consistent: a gradual downplaying of what they experienced. It seems as though the human mind recoils from an encounter with the Otherworld.

It is my opinion that many forteans have lost their way today, or remain in some kind of "Cottingley Fairy time-warp". As Rudyard Kipling's Puck proclaimed in protest: "Butterfly wings, indeed!" Fortean today need to be vigilant that they do not fall victim to the worst kind of scepticism and remain in the past. I wonder what Fort would make of it all.

John Chordman

Sheffield, South Yorkshire



ANIMAL GHOSTS

I am an artist working on a film project about people's paranormal experiences. I have a longstanding interest in all aspects of the paranormal, and am planning a project incorporating first-hand accounts of these experiences, especially those involving animal ghosts. I would like to interview anyone who has seen an animal ghost. This could be your deceased cat or dog paying a visit, phantom horses galloping in old battlefields or a famous case like the Loch Ness monster. I intend to film interviews in person, but if that is not possible, then by Skype or phone. Your participation can be anonymous if you wish. Please contact me by the email address below.

Emilia Ukkonen

emilia.ukkonen.projects@gmail.com

It Happened to Me...

Timeslip in Grimsby

Further to Jenny Randles detailing the Oz-factor [FT398:30-31], I outline a strange experience with multiple witnesses. I had a chance to revisit the site of the event with my children and this sparked off a need to record what happened. In 1977 I was at a secondary school in Grimsby and on an autumn evening a crowd of school friends called and we set off from Old Clee to Grimsby town centre. We followed a familiar route across Old Clee playing fields to Ladysmith Road and cut through a passageway to the end of David Street. We walked almost to the far end of David Street and turned right into a passage that led to Patrick Street with a plan to arrive on Hainton Avenue. As we entered the passageway joining David Street to Patrick Street, we passed garages to our right and were funnelled into the narrow connecting passageway at the back of the houses. On approaching the narrow section of the passageway, we could see bright white lights like a series of spotlights on the passageway wall on the left. The lights then pulsed brighter and dimmer and the wall appeared to change into a privet hedge with the trunks, leaves and shape clear in the surrounding dark night.

We stopped dead, bewildered by the light show and transformation of wall into privet hedge. House windows looking onto the passageway were unlit and no occupants visible. All sound stopped for about 20 seconds. There was no background noise such as traffic or people walking – and then the light show faded out and the wall came back into focus.

When the wall was clearly visible again, the evening sounds returned all at once with a baby crying, a cat meowing, a radio playing, voices and noise of traffic loud and clear. Lights came on in some of the windows.



The bus displayed an ad for a store that had closed seven years ago

We looked at each other all perplexed. We all remarked how weird the experience had been, as if time had stopped for those 20 or so seconds. I smelt an unusual aroma that reminded me of dodgem cars, and this lingered for a while. On leaving the passageway and entering Patrick Street, an old black cab juddered past slowly in front of us en route to Hainton Avenue, as if it had rolled off a 1960s film set. The driver was a withered old man wearing a flat cap and oblivious to us emerging onto the pavement in front of him. The cab turned right onto Hainton Avenue in the direction of Welholme Road.

As we approached Hainton Avenue, a solitary old-style blue double-decker bus (like the one in the *On the Buses* comedy show) slowly passed in the same direction as the cab, displaying an advert for Guy & Smiths department

store (above). It was dimly lit on the upper and lower decks and the driver silhouetted, but we couldn't see any passengers. It slowly drove down an empty Hainton Avenue. We remarked that both cab and bus looked out of place, and the bus displayed an advert for a store that had closed seven years earlier, in 1970.

After about a half a minute we could see traffic flowing and eventually encountered pedestrians. We couldn't see where the source of the lights originated in the passageway and couldn't determine how a brick wall appeared to transform into a privet hedge and back again. The switching on and off of sound made a big impact on all of us because it was so distinct. We all felt out of sorts and spent the rest of the evening unsettled as we tried to come up with a rational explanation.

We all perceived this as a real event and spent the following weeks investigating what it might have been. We asked around to enquire if there had been old vehicles exhibited that evening or around that time, but drew a blank. There was of course no Internet in 1977. We never got a definitive answer to

whether an advert for 'Guy & Smiths' had ever appeared on a Grimsby and Cleethorpes bus. Some of us tried shining torches on the wall to simulate what we had seen, but this was nowhere as bright. On one evening we observed a car driving into the entrance, but the light was dispersed; and anyway we would have seen and heard a car pulling in. We weren't aware of any stories of odd events in that area at that time.

Some years later when I was on the London Underground, I thought the ozone smell was like the dodgem car aroma I had perceived. Has anyone encountered anything similar or heard any strange reports associated with this passageway?

Mike (full name on file)
Manchester

Grinning widely

Shortly after reading Theo Pajmans's article on grinning men [FT397:32-34], my friend Dave Archer, a veteran of a number of Centre for Fortean Zoology expeditions, told me of his own encounter with a smiling ghost. In 2018 he was on holiday in Magaluf, Majorca, with his wife and friends, staying in the Kathmandu Hotel. On their last night, Dave, wanting to retire early as they were leaving next morning, returned to the hotel, leaving his wife and friends at a bar. As he had to work on his return to England, he had not drunk any alcohol. After sleeping for a while, he awoke and noticed a white shape obscuring the wide-screen TV situated on the wall at the foot of his bed.

The shape resolved itself into that of a youngish man with a shaven head, naked from the waist up. He was grinning widely and had clenched fists that he moved up and down as if dancing. Indeed Dave said the figure's movement reminded him of a 'raver'. The figure was not transparent but seemed to glow like a low wattage light

bulb. Dave said he was not afraid but fascinated. The entity seemed to notice him and sidled around the side of the bed, still grinning and dancing. It bent over and put its smiling face close to Dave's. At this point he lost his bottle and dived under the covers while throwing a punch at the bedroom invader. His fist connected with nothing and when he peeked out again the figure had vanished. There has been at least one suicide of a British tourist at the hotel, but whether this had any connection with Dave's grinning ghost is unknown.

Richard Freeman
Exeter, Devon

Sky mirage

I was interested in the photos of ships appearing to float in the sky [FT405:11], because I think I have witnessed something similar inland [although see "Sky ships" FT407:67]. To be precise, in Bickley town near Malpas, Cheshire, when I was about four or five years old. My family were at the junction of the road between the A49-No Man's Heath and Bickley Town Road. The grown-ups were gossiping and I looked away, to the west, towards No Man's Heath and Malpas, up to the sky, where I saw three railway wagons floating in the air. In later years I have often wondered whether I had had a vivid dream or hallucination. However, the sight was probably a mirage of wagons on the Chester-Tattenhall-Whitchurch branch line.

Raymond Vickers
Birkby, Huddersfield

Henry Hall calling

About 20 years ago – I think it was the summer of 2000 – my husband and I visited a friend who collects old teddy bears. He'd recently bought an antique HMV horn gramophone, which came with an old 78rpm record, which he duly played for us. It was a 1932 recording of "Teddy Bear's Picnic" by the then popular bandleader, Henry Hall (pictured above).

The next morning was a workday, and as usual we were awoken by our radio



alarm clock at around 6am. Always set to Radio 4's *Today* programme, presented at that time by John Humphrys. Henry Hall was mentioned in passing.

At that time, we both worked in Birmingham and used to catch the bus together to the city centre. As with most commuters, we picked up a couple of copies of the free *Metro* newspaper on the bus and I began browsing the letters page. Next to one of the letters was a small, old-fashioned sepia photograph of a bespectacled man in evening dress, with the caption: "The band leader, Henry Hall". The topic of the letter had no connection to the conversation on the *Today* programme that morning.

During my lunch break, I was sitting at the table in the office rest room, where someone had left a newspaper open on the sports page, showing the horseracing fixtures for the day. Eating my sandwiches and with nothing in particular to read, I glanced down the list. I know absolutely nothing about horseracing or placing a bet, but I noticed a horse called Henry Hall with what seemed to be quite good odds.

Purely because this run of coincidences now seemed to be significant, I felt that I should somehow try to place a bet on this horse. I knew a colleague in the next office to be a betting man, so I dashed in and told him the story. All I had on me in cash that day was a five pound note, but he was so impressed that he placed more on that horse than me – £10, if memory serves. Henry Hall duly came in first and I won £50.

Carolyn Taylor
Halesowen, West Midlands

Only connect

I like the idea of a "lattice of coincidence that lies on top of everything" (as quoted by Anne Henderson ["Plates of shrimp", FT399:71]). I find this happens all the time. I learn a new word and suddenly I see it everywhere; I think of somebody I haven't seen for ages and they reappear in my life; I decide to ring someone and they ring me; I give a book to a friend at the same time as they give the same book to me and so on ad infinitum. I am sure many FT readers relate to this. Here are a few things that have

happened to me over the past week [in November 2020]. I was discussing various films with a friend and she remarked that she liked Charlotte Rampling and wondered if she was still around as she hadn't seen her in a film for ages. The next day Rampling starred in two films shown on BBC4 and Channel 4 (*DNA* and *Sparrow*). A friend gave me a book by an author I hadn't heard about; I switched on the radio and the said author was talking on *Woman's Hour*.

One of my sons and I were discussing buying a new television, so we looked on the Internet to see what we could find. The next day, as I was about to order the TV, I had an email from another son, Luke, telling me that he thought I needed a new television and that he had ordered one as a surprise. Of course, it was the same model as I had intended to buy. Luke had had no idea of my intentions; the idea had come to him "out of the blue".

One of the best 'plates of shrimp' occurred in the 1970s when I was living in Bath. At the time I was interested in Arthur Guirdham and his theories about the Cathars. When we moved to Bath, I knew nothing about the Cathars – where Guirdham lived or where he worked or whether he was the person he said he was (a psychiatrist in a big hospital) – but his story intrigued me. I got a job at a doctor's surgery and found that Guirdham was a patient there. I was reading *We Are One Another* at the time and discovered (quite by accident?) that Clare, the main character, was also a patient at the surgery. When she came in, she was immediately recognisable, both by her appearance, including her 'English Rose' complexion, and by her manner. It gave me a sort of déjà vu feeling as I felt I already knew her. I discovered her real name and it was gratifying to find out that she actually existed, and it gave me a real thrill when I thought about her "secret Cathar past" which, at the time, I really believed. It was as if a whole chain of coincidences had been set in motion solely for my benefit.

Anna David
Wellington, Somerset

LETTERS

Avoid the woods

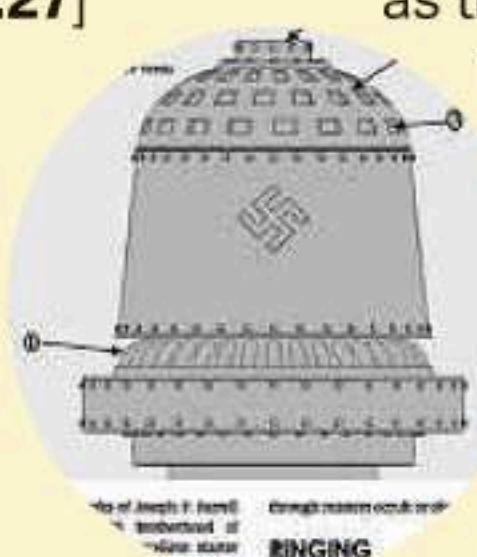
In 1994 I had friends renting in the Abbots Leigh and Clifton areas around Bristol. We noted the official figures given for rurally homeless people and homeless people in Bristol were woefully underestimated. The 'Bear Pit', bus station and subways in central Bristol and various park-ups and camping areas were, by day, clearly full of people with no other place to go; but homeless people were strangely less apparent at night. I ascertained, from asking directly, that a lot of homeless people felt in the 'Bear Pit' there was prolific drinking and drug use, and too much noise. [The 'Bear Pit' is a failed town-planning scheme, intended to be a retail and pedestrian 'hub' with tunnel walkways and a central circular space.] Less lit areas attracted violence and harassment; predominantly, people asleep in doorways and arcades were at risk of being kicked and/or urinated on. Parking bays had vehicle and fire risks. Sleeping out could earn you repetitive police harassment and vagrancy convictions with resulting court dates, warrants and escalating fines.

So, I repeatedly enquired, where were people sleeping? There were hints and vague answers, none enlightening. Maybe, I supposed, a lot of vehicle/tent dwellers and itinerants were dossing in the nearby Ashton Court, Leigh, Abbots Leigh and Failand forests? In early September I discovered otherwise. Substantial groups were sharing empty property, usually ex-offices or basements. In a road adjacent to my friends' flat, one basement was opened from an external street floor level every night after 9pm. Between 10 and 25 mostly young sober people would turn up with small bedrolls and dash in via a hatch as discreetly as possible. Locals had no cause to complain; there were no signs of forced entry, no litter, no excrement, no noise. If you didn't see people entering, or scarpering before 6am, you had no idea they stayed there. Also quietly populated at night were a lot of gardens, church and



Time machine?

I couldn't help but notice that the object reportedly found in a Polish forest [FT401:27] was bell-shaped (well sort of); and so I was surprised that someone hadn't proposed that it was related to *Die Glocke*, the so called Nazi wonder weapon (*Wunderwaffe*), that was supposedly 'developed' in occupied Poland. It has even been proposed that it was not a Nazi anti-gravity flying saucer, but in fact a time machine,



which would reappear at some time... So perhaps this is it, finally reappearing?

Of course, more prosaically, as the article suggests, it is probably merely the result of fly-tipping a concrete mixing unit, although I am led to believe that the scrap value would be quite high if it's as big as that, so an odd thing to dump in a forest. But it's always worth stirring the pot for those who believe that "The truth is out there".

Andy Kelly
By email

brewery properties and pockets around Temple Meads station.

Nobody was sleeping in the woods, apparently. In summer, this didn't make much sense to me. But people of various ages, races and backgrounds unanimously insisted they would never be on the downs or in the woods after dusk. Ashton Court house has a reputation for loud bangs, doors and windows slamming or opening, and shrieks that people insist are not wildlife, imagination, or weather-related. There are, I was often told, 'trouble' and 'things' in these woods, and dog owners maintained their pets wouldn't stay there overnight. Despite many risks, people took their chances at night in the town, maybe stayed up all night, but did not ever consider Leigh. Not even in a van. A lot of vehicle dwellers were based around

two cemeteries, apparently not remotely gothic, atmospheric, or haunted, compared to the woods around the city.

Another site nobody would sleep in was the vast warehouse complex below Clifton, approaching the Hot Wells site (now inaccessible). The yarn told me was of a homeless man who had been discovered dead in the complex in the 1980s – no identification was made. His restless/confused shade wandered around near the 'P&O' warehouse and would on occasion alarm security patrols. An ex-security guard informs me there were accounts of hauntings on that site and at another in town, but

that these were allegedly silent sightings of "ghosts of 'Roman dressed' men". Security guards were vigilant in keeping anyone from being in Temple Meads or the warehouse complexes, he confirmed, mostly to avoid potential falls or drowning.

There are other social groups I'd expect to find in rolling hills, verdant copses, and unpatrolled parkland on summer evenings and after dark around very populated urban centres: bored teenagers and students; ornithologists and wildlife enthusiasts; hardened late night tokers. Also, that staple of the topiary border or sand dune: men cruising. Hampstead or Holland Park and our local coast in the same era could often be busy with single men taking casual strolls on certain pleasant warm nights.

But nothing human seems keen to patrol or cruise or examine Leigh Woods. No evidence of teddy bears' picnics, no backpackers roughing it, no youths, no romantic trysts, no dispossessed seeking a space to sleep or sit out empty hours in peace. Not even a solitary ABC. I was earnestly warned not to research the place alone. "Watch it", frowned a cider-sipping veteran on the Cathedral Green. "Stay well away... Something bad is up on the Downs".

Lucy Brown
Pilton, Somerset



"Yeah, but he wasn't just the devourer of souls, he also created lots of jobs."

PECULIAR POSTCARDS

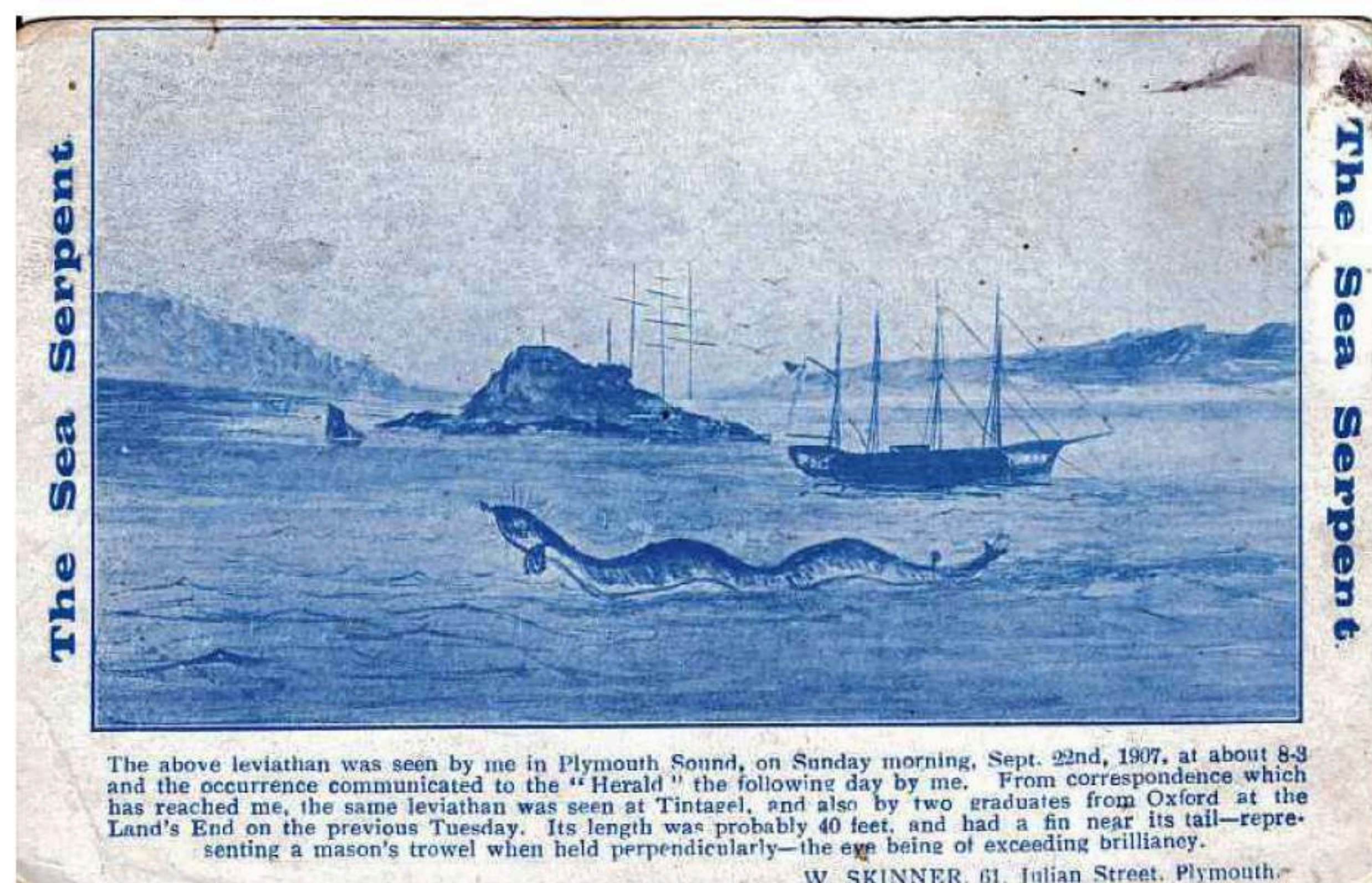


JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past recalls a visitor to Cornwall even stranger than those brought by the recent G7 summit...

18. THE TINTAGEL SEA SERPENT OF 1907

In September 1907, Mr Edward Spencer Dodgson MA, of Jesus College, Oxford, was staying at the Clifton House hotel in Tintagel, Cornwall, along with his friend, the Rev. TC Davies MA, of Queen's College, Oxford, who served as chaplain of the almshouses in Sheffield. At 11.45 am on 12 September, when the two friends were seated on the edge of the cliff at Gulla Stem, Rev Davies called his colleague's attention to a dark object in the sea, moving very rapidly towards Tintagel Head. To their amazement, it turned out to be a sea serpent 20ft (6m) in length, holding its large head, which apparently had some kind of crest or mane upon it, aloft as it swam. "Unfortunately we had no telescope with us, still less a Kodak wherewith to take its likeness," the two Oxford men lamented. Still, they made haste to write a letter to the *Western Morning Post* that it was now definitely proven that the great sea serpent really did exist.

The letter caused a brief but intense sea serpent mania in the West of England. Two other Oxford graduates thought they had seen the sea serpent off Land's End, and the Plymouth man W Skinner, of 61 Julian Street, issued a picture postcard of a sea serpent he had seen in Plymouth Sound on Sunday 22 September. This creature was 40ft (12m) in length and had a small fin near its tail. But the London naturalists stood ready to nip the sea serpent mania in the bud. They knew that the ribbon fish occurred in these parts, and that a paper in the *Scientific American* of 1903 had pointed out that these thin and elongated fishes could greatly resemble sea serpents to the ignorant layman. Named for their ribbon-like appearance, these



ABOVE: A copy of Mr Skinner's rare postcard of the sea serpent he claimed to have seen in Plymouth Sound.

pelagic fishes are seldom seen alive, since they typically live in deep waters, although disease or disorientation may cause them to surface. They are typically 5-8ft. (1.5-2.4m) long, but a specimen caught in America was not less than 21ft (6.4m) in length.

By 1907, sea serpent sightings had become yesterday's news, a silly-season story worthy of derision by a brave new Edwardian world that had no need for the hoary myths of yesteryear. "Our old friend the sea serpent, probably because it has been such a bad summer, has been absent for a long time, but the brief spell of fine weather has brought him out," sneered the *Aberdeen Journal*. "More than once I have called attention to the fact that the sea serpent has fallen on evil days and evil tongues, and is by no means what he once was. A proof of this sad decadence is provided by the manner in which a tale about our

old friend appearing off Tintagel, in Cornwall, has been dismissed by scornful journalists ..." wrote the 'In Lighter Vein' columnist of the *Derby Daily Telegraph*. Exposed to ridicule in the press for their foolish credulity, Mr Dodgson and Rev. Brooks limped back to Oxford with their tails between their legs. Today, Mr Skinner's postcard is the only memorial of this forgotten sea serpent mania of 1907, with three alleged West of England sightings of this elusive creature within the same month.

And here the story would have ended had it not been for a communication from Dr R Darwall-Smith, Archivist at Jesus College, regarding the career of the sea serpent observer Edward Spencer Dodgson (1857-1922). After early studies at New College, leaving without a degree, Dodgson was registered at Jesus College in 1901 and awarded an honorary MA in

1907. He was a philologist and wrote a number of papers for *Notes and Queries* and other learned periodicals, one of them translating Shakespeare's epitaph into Basque. In 1913, when he was studying Gaelic in Ireland, he claimed to have found a stone that gave clues as to the whereabouts of the treasure of an old Irish chieftain, but nothing came of this. In 1918, when studying at the Bath Reference Library, he went for an excursion to Wells, where he was caught in the act improperly assaulting a lad of 17. At the Somerset Assizes, the 'nasty old man' Dodgson was sentenced to three months of hard labour; back home in Oxford, his name was struck off the books of Jesus College, for good. He died from 'softening of the brain' in October 1922, at Camberwell House Asylum in London where he had spent the declining months of his life.

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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FORTEAN TIMES 409

ON SALE 12 AUG 2021

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Ray Galindo was leaving an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in Modesto, California, when he was struck by drunk driver Brandon Howze and killed. Armando, one of Galindo's fellow AA members, said: "What an irony of life to come here and try to be sober, try to be a better person, and then you go out by one of us, technically" *dailymail.co.uk, 10 May 2021.*

When police arrested a man for dangerous driving after he crashed near the town of Jafre in Spain, near the French border, after driving 19 miles (30km) down the wrong side of a motorway, they made a macabre discovery. Strapped into the passenger seat under a blanket was the body of a Swiss man. He appeared to have been dead for some time as the body had started to decompose, with the hands already appearing mummified. On questioning, it became clear that the corpse belonged to the driver's partner and that the drive had begun several weeks earlier as a final road trip for the terminally ill man, taking a meandering route from Spain through France and into Italy, then back again, taking more than three weeks as they dodged coronavirus restrictions. The passenger had passed away en route, but the driver could not bear to leave his partner behind, so carried on with their journey. *Times, 12 April 2021.*

An inquest into the death of exiled Russian businessman Nikolai Glushkov, 68, who died by apparent suicide in 2018, concluded that he had, in fact, been murdered by someone who had tried to make it look like a suicide. Glushkov had been found dead with a dog lead around his neck next to a small stepladder in his home in New Malden, Surrey, a week after Russian agents poisoned Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury. Medics were immediately suspicious because of the careful placing of the suicide paraphernalia and the fact that the stepladder had not been knocked over, as is more usual in suicides. The coroner concluded that Glushkov, a former Aeroflot director and a critic of President Putin, had been killed using a "garotted sleeper hold" by an unknown third party. *D.Mail, 10 April 2021.*

Twelve-year-old Joshua Haileyesus died in hospital in Aurora, Colorado, several days after his twin brother found him

collapsed on the bathroom floor of their home. Haileyesus had apparently been trying to take part in a "blackout challenge" that had gone viral on TikTok encouraging people to post videos of them choking themselves until they passed out.

He had previously bragged to his brother about being able to hold his breath for a minute. *Knoxville News-Sentinel 16 April, 2021.*

The body of a 39-year-old man was discovered in the leg of a life-sized papier-mâché stegosaurus in Santa Coloma de Gramenet near Barcelona after a passer-by and his son noticed the smell. The father peered through a crack in the dinosaur's leg and saw the corpse, face down, jammed inside. Local police said: "This person got inside the statue's leg and got trapped. It looks as though he was trying to retrieve a mobile phone, which he'd dropped. It looks like he entered the statue headfirst and couldn't get out." It is believed he got in through a hatch in the creature's belly. The victim's family had recently reported him missing after not seeing him for two days, believing him to be sleeping rough. The statue was originally been built to promote a local cinema and was known to be used by rough sleepers. It has now been removed after firefighters had to saw the leg off to retrieve the dead man. *Guardian, 24 May; Iflscience.com, Independent, BBC News, 25 May 2021.*

Alerted by flies and a stench coming from the flat of Clara Ines Tobon, 79, neighbours in her Madrid apartment block called the police. When officers broke in, they found Tobon's corpse lying on the floor surrounded by the bodies of five of her cats, which had died of starvation, along with two more that were alive but severely malnourished. It appeared that Tobon had died of Covid-19 at least three months before she was discovered and that her pets had eaten most of her body from the waist up before it had become too decomposed to be edible. An autopsy on one of the dead cats confirmed that it had eaten its owner's flesh. Tobon, who had moved to Spain from Colombia decades ago, lived alone and had no partner or children, and few friends, neighbours said. A spokesman for the social housing agency where she lived said they had not noticed their tenant was dead as her bills continued to be paid on time. *7news.com.au, 2 Jun 2021.*



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